THE WOMAN TAMER

Wayne had scarcely time to shout a frantic "Watch out!" when Black fired.

THE WOMAN TAMER

BY

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FRONTISPIECE BY

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NEW YORK

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CHAPTER I

THE BRUTE TAMER

WAYNE YEATMAN shifted his gaze out of the window to where the train conductor was escorting a young woman toward the car steps, carrying her luggage for her.

She was dressed as if for an afternoon promenade on Fifth Avenue, had a wealth of flame-of-gold hair, the large, long-lashed, wide eyes of a child and undeniably attractive features, but there was no color in her skin; it was white as milk and her wrists and ankles were uncommonly slim. She looked as if a good jolt might send her into a faint.

"Regular millionaire's daughter, wrapped up pretty and highly perfumed," thought Wayne. "What in hades can one of her sort be doing in this he-man's country?"

The young woman entered Wayne's car and took a seat at the front end near the drinking water tank. The conductor carefully arranged the two suitcases in the rack for her, then tipped his hat, smiled, and

left the car. Plainly to be gathered from his actions that pretty young women of her sort were not often met with on his run. She produced a book, settled cozily into the seat and began to read.

"Easy enough to catalogue this flapper," thought Wayne. "One of the sort who gets anything she wants with a few sweet words and a baby-doll stare. That damn-fool conductor would let her walk on his neck."

Wayne Yeatman himself was tall, tanned and thirty; muscular, with a close curling head of dark hair. His rather solid face would have been classically symmetrical but for a deeply wide and irregular scare that extended across the cheek from his left eye almost to the angle of his jaw. It had been caused by the clawing stroke of an infuriated leopard. Many people thought the scar added to rather than detracted from his appearance, lent character to his features.

Quiet, almost taciturn, spare in gesture, yet moving with the quick, springy tread of an animal, his was the form and the sharply alert carriage of a ruggedly healthy outdoor man; his eyes slumberously brown when he was uninterested, abruptly changing to a deep red that seemed actually to glow like burning rubies when he was aroused.

Hard and bitter in his views of life Yeatman was

apt to be, but there wasn't a mean streak in his make-up, and he was clean, way in to the soul of him; no possible price could have induced him to carry through himself, or aid another in a piece of underhand work, to sit in at any game he could not play absolutely fair, win or lose, to the finish.

For the next hour Yeatman did not look again at the girl. She was not his sort, and he had small use for women anyway. To his mind the name female, in beast or human, invariably spelled trouble. A fine and motherly woman he had never known; those his life had so far brought him in contact with had been of a pretty drab sort.

After a time, Yeatman's attention was caught by the actions of a number of young Italians who had been seated at the other end of the car. Several of these men appeared to have suddenly developed a seemingly inordinate thirst for ice water, passing up and down the aisle in an almost endless procession, each one hanging about the drinking water tank as long as he could find reasonable excuse for doing so, trying to catch the eyes of the girl seated nearby.

One young Italian, dressed in a loud suit, winged collar and a white shirt with half inch wide stripes of purple, bolder than the rest, finally mustered up courage enough to lean toward the girl and offer some remark.

Wayne could not hear what was said, but he saw her look up and answer in a pleasant, though somewhat perfunctory manner, then drop her eyes to the book. He smiled cynically.

Dropping into the seat beside her, the man spoke to the girl in Italian. Evidently she understood, for her face became quickly animated and she answered in the same language. They talked together for several moments. The girl was palpably interested but also, it was evident, a little bewildered, perhaps not sure yet how best to handle the situation.

Wayne Yeatman's actual experience in the upper strata of society had been decidedly limited; yet he had read a lot and he thought he knew how a well bred woman would have met the experience through which this girl a few seats ahead of him was passing.

One of his own profession, he knew, would have snapped, with a disdainful curl of her lip: "Back out, Willie, you're in the wrong stall." This failing, she would have promptly and with no uncertain hand, slapped the man's face, which would have effectually terminated the affair. A woman accustomed to finer things, Wayne imagined, would have calmly frozen the young man with a dignified stare; then, in a few well chosen words, put it beyond the shadow of a doubt that his acquaintance was not desired.

At an early age, Yeatman had run away from his home and oppressive parental authority in a small Virginia town and joined a traveling animal show, eventually becoming an expert trainer. He had learned to successfully handle lions, tigers, panthers; in fact, about all of the jungle animals. Several disastrous experiences had fallen to his lot, to some of which the scar on his face and his scarred hands and arms testified, but to him this was only a part of the day's work. He had been the first man to exhibit thirty tigers in a steel barred cage at one time, an act that had not yet been duplicated.

Men told him his marked success in animal training was because he possessed a hypnotic eye, whatever that is. Himself, he scoffed at this, claimed the whole thing was merely a case of teaching your brute pupil in the beginning that you were his master and never thereafter, no matter what might happen, permitting him to realize that you feared him; which was probably as close to the truth of the matter as the human mind, uncomprehending the sealed animal mind, may come.

Yeatman was on his way now to the end of the rail line, there to take whatever mode of travel might be available in reaching the Big Loon Lake country in Ungava, that vast land of mystery to

the north of Quebec from whence come the finest furs the world produces.

He had heard vague reports of a strike of copper up there and there he owned a matter of a thousand acres, more or less, recently inherited from a paternal grandfather who had bought several adjoining claims at a time when a man could take up three hundred and twenty acres for himself—now he can take up but forty.

It might be there was some of the red metal on this land, Wayne didn't know. If there was, he intended to dispose of his holdings to the best possible advantage and return to the States, for copper the metal was selling at 11c and, at present, there was no profit in mining anything but the very highest grade ore. Two thirds of the world's copper mines had shut down completely because of the low selling price.

Aside from owning that thousand acres, Wayne was practically broke, for which there were adequate reasons—one of which was that his last engagement had been with a road show managed by a woman who had done him for six months' salary. He had only enough money to carry him to the end of the railway line; after that he would be forced to work his way.

Yeatman watched the girl and the Italian for a

few moments with only mild interest. Then he saw the young man throw one arm across the back of the seat and, in emphasizing some remark, press the girl's shoulder with his hand.

She drew away. In his partial view of her face, Wayne thought he saw fright. Before, he had merely been contemptuously amused; now there was something in the girl's face that changed matters, aroused him. His eyes began to glow.

"If that wop don't behave himself there's apt to be a small sized Italian clem"—he meant fight—"on in this car in about two shakes," he reflected. "I haven't anything against his talking to the dame, if she's agreeable, but he's got to behave himself."

At that moment the Italian dropped his arm about the girl's waist. In a second Wayne was standing beside them, his hat in his hand.

"Pardon me, miss," he said, "but is this man annoying you?"

The Italian turned and confronted Wayne with indrawn chin and outthrust lip.

"Boss, you keep a out dis, or maybe you get a de troub'."

Wayne's whole body stiffened and his arm shot out. Grasping the Italian by the collar of his coat, he yanked him to his feet.

"So I get a de troub', eh? You keep to the other

end of this car for the remainder of this trip, or I'll give you more troub' than you can comfortably digest in a month of Sundays."

He gave the man a hearty shove down the aisle.

The Italian stumbled for a step or two, caught himself, whirled and confronted Wayne with an evil scowl and a knife in his hand.

Over the man's shoulder Wayne could see the rest of the gang rushing up in a bunch, hurdling seats and leaping over one another like frenzied animals in their haste to go to their comrade's aid. His shoulders straightened. A whole hearted fight was meat and drink to Wayne Yeatman, and the wild blood of him sang in his veins.

Wayne's first powerful fist blow, all the weight of his steel muscled body behind it, crashed home on the under jaw of the young man with the knife, putting him down and out, knocking over two of his onrushing companions as he fell. Then, as Wayne's swinging arms began to strike out right and left, the whole gang was upon him.

He had planted a half dozen blows and two more men were down, when three of the heaviest Italians, including a fat *padrone,* mounted seats at his rear and fell upon him in á bunch.

He dropped to the floor of the car, half smothered

beneath their weight, still desperately fighting with fists, feet and teeth.

Two heavy nail-studded boot taps, propelled by two hundred and fifty pounds of fat Italian, descended one on each of his arms, pinning them to the floor. Unable to do anything save kick ineffectively, he was beginning to feel himself beaten when a softly warm hand holding something hard and cold touched one of his own hands that was pinned to the floor.

He gripped the cold thing quickly, realized that it was an automatic, managed to twist up his wrist and began to pump out the shots.

CHAPTER II

THE FLAPPER

With cries of dismay, the Italians fell away. In one breathless second, Wayne was on his feet again, crouched, confronting them.

Covering those still able to stand with his weapon, he had just shouted: "You damn wops, get back to the other end of the car and stay there, or I'll plug every one of you," when the door behind was thrown open and a bellowing voice cried:

"What the devil are your men trying to do here, Giacca? Who started that shooting? Thought I had all you chaps disarmed. Must have been hiding out on me."

A tall dark man stood in the aisle scowling. One of the Italians, the fat *padrone,* was bending forward, the sweat dripping from his features, offering stammering apologies.

"Boss, we mak a no troub'; no troub' at all. We no shoot. Theese man here, he start a de fight. He strik one a my men, Giuseppi; knock out two more."

"The darned wop was annoying that girl there,"

explained Wayne, flipping a finger toward the pale featured young woman. "He asked for all he got and pulled a knife on me."

The *padrone* pointed to the senseless Giuseppi, lying on the floor.

"You see, Giusep', he only a boy; he just play a little."

"All right, but let's have no more of this," said the dark man. "Come, *padrona,* take your men down to the other end of the car, bring them to, and give me that knife. I got work for you chaps to do at the camp; can't have any of you getting killed before you reach there. The next man I find hiding out a weapon on me, I'll ship him back to Quebec."

He turned to Wayne and offered his hand as he added:

"I'm Bill Black, head of the Black-Downey interests. I'm taking this bunch of Italians—there's a whole immigrant car full of them up ahead—into the Big Loon Lake country in Ungava; got some copper land there—at least, we think there's copper; may be fooled, though."

"My name's Yeatman," offered Wayne. "I'm also on my way up country; own a little land near Big Loon Lake myself."

Black dropped Wayne's hand and eyed him narrowly.

"Say, you're not related to old Anthony Wayne Yeatman, are you?" he snapped. "You look the dead spit of him."

"He was my grandfather; left me this land when he died," answered Wayne, aware of a sudden born antagonism in this tall dark man confronting him.

Black had high cheek bones and was sharp featured almost to the point of emaciation. Though he had an abundant head of straight black hair, his face was entirely without eyebrows and had no sign of a beard.

Wayne had mentally catalogued the man as a person with considerable Indian blood in him, which was true. Black's mother had been a full blooded Apache—plains Apache, not Arizona Apache, which is quite different when it comes to the nature of the beast.

"So you're going up to Big Loon to look your inheritance over?" commented Black. "Then I'll probably see you often; reckon our claims join."

With which remark he walked down the aisle toward where the *padrone,* Giacca, was speedily reviving his three men with copious draughts of *chianti* from a well filled bottle.

Wayne turned to the young woman who had sunk back into her original seat, produced a tiny mirror and was industriously powdering her nose.

"This your automatic?" he asked, holding forward the weapon.

She looked up. "I think it is, but won't you please keep it? Auntie made me take two, but I should never dare fire them and don't believe I could hit a house if I aimed for it at fifty feet."

Wayne gazed down thoughtfully at the weapon.

"Sure you don't mind?" he said a little diffidently. "It came pretty near saving my life; I feel attached to it already, and I don't happen to carry a firearm."

"Of course I don't mind, or I should never have offered it," she answered, holding toward him a package she had just drawn forth from her hand-bag. "You'd better take these bullets, or cartridges, or whatever they call them, too."

He accepted the package with thanks and had turned to return to his seat when she arose quickly and laid a hand on his arm.

"Please wait just a moment. I haven't thanked you yet for coming to my aid when that man became annoying. I have traveled considerably in Italy. He spoke Italian; so do I. I hoped, when he opened a conversation, that he might be polite and nice, and that we could have a pleasant chat about his homeland. Some of the Italian peasants can be wonderfully fine; but I saw, of course, after a moment, that he only intended to be fresh. It was

tremendously good of you to protect me; I am very grateful."

Wayne looked at the girl with a half puzzled, half scornful smile. She was thanking him most graciously, yet, somehow, he thought he caught a peculiar undertone in her voice, or perhaps a look in the depths of her handsome beryl-gray eyes that seemed to add the unexpressed mental reservation: "Of course I could have got the situation in hand myself, after a while, if you hadn't interfered."

"Handled it herself!" he thought. "She'd have been as helpless as an infant. The poor baby doesn't know anything." He made a sudden resolution.

Affection for his adult brute pupils was something Wayne Yeatman had never felt; he was too keenly aware of the infinite treachery that forever lurked in the nature of them. Yet a tiger kitten, or a young lion cub, frolicsome, awkwardly helpless, was a thing that appealed to him. Those he defended, petted and played with until they began to develop their blindly brutal fighting instincts. Then he knew the time had come to teach them that he was master, and he did it relentlessly, in the brute way, the only way they could understand—with the whip. Now, there had come into Yeatman's heart, something of the feeling he had often experienced when handling

a softly furred and helpless young tiger kitten only a few weeks old.

Dropping into the seat beside the girl, he said: "Please don't think I'm attempting, like that Italian, to get fresh; but may I ask you one question? You don't have to answer if you don't want to. I shan't be offended."

For some reason which Wayne could not at the moment fathom, a warm wave of color suddenly overspread the girl's features and her eyes dropped before his gaze.

"Of course you may ask your question," she said after a second's hesitation. "One can be sensible about talking with strangers, as well as silly, can't one? What is it you wished to know?"

"Well, first, where are you going?"

"Up to the Big Loon Lake district in Ungava," she answered. "Auntie and I own some land up there, what is known as the Chovard tract, about a thousand acres, and we've recently heard there may be copper on it—or in it, whichever is correct."

Wayne Yeatman stared at her, unable, almost, to credit his sense of hearing.

"Holy cats!" he thought. "Am I dreaming or did I get her wrong?"

Aloud he finally managed to stammer, leaning a trifle closer:

"Pardon me, miss, but did you say your land was the Chovard tract?"

"Yes," she answered. "The Chovard tract. The original owner was my step-uncle, marrying auntie for his second wife. He's dead."

For a moment Wayne's mind was in a daze, his thoughts complex. Then:

"Going up there alone?"

Her head tilted a trifle to one side as she studied his face.

"I believe the original bargain was for a single question, wasn't it?"

"Yes," he replied gravely. "You don't have to answer any more if you don't want to."

She laughed, a pleasant laugh. "How serious you are. Of course I'll answer another, all you wish—and that I can. Answering questions so simple as these would be the least I could do in return for your gallantry in protecting me a moment ago."

"Forget that," he interrupted, already feeling a little ashamed of it himself, as if, perhaps, he had ventured in where he really had no business to.

"Yes, I'm going alone," she continued. "I'm doing it partly because I wish to prove that a young woman who conducts herself properly can go anywhere she desires in America without being harmed. Besides, realizing how frail I am, I want to become

hardened and to see life, in the raw, as they say, and I want to find out all I can about the Chovard tract."

"But, great hokum, woman, do you realize what this country is that you're going into with two suitcases and a load of primeval innocence? Do you know that they call the whole district between the Marquette and the Sipigon rivers, Hell's Doorway? It's no place for a woman, that is, no place for a gently reared woman of your sort. Why, I don't believe you ever slept out under the stars and the sky in all your life."

Her face became sober. "No, I never did; but aren't there any hotels or boarding houses up there?"

"Hotels and boarding houses!" he exclaimed. "There aren't houses of any kind. Don't you understand? Ungava is an unsettled country. Aside from around Fort Carillon, there's no shelter to live in except what you take along with you."

"Well, I really didn't know," she answered. "I left Quebec suddenly without preparation; but I shall get along somehow. I'm not disappointed; in fact, I'm rather glad, for, as I said before, what I want to do is rough it."

Wayne glared at her in blank amazement. Rough it in Ungava with high heels and two suit cases!

"Ye gods, what an awakening she's got coming to

her!" he thought. "She won't last two days after she leaves the train; she'll crack at the first jolt. Why, the self-conscious little flapper can't even talk fifteen minutes without pausing to powder her nose; she's done it a half dozen times since I first saw her."

"May I inquire," he asked a little diffidently, "why you left Quebec so suddenly? I know it's an impertinent question, but I'll explain later why I want to know."

"I've no objection to telling you," she answered. "There was a man wished to marry me."

Wayne stared. "Great hokum; you didn't have to run away; couldn't you say no?"

"But I'd been saying no for several years," she explained patiently. "I was beginning to be afraid I might sometime have a moment of weakness and say yes. So, as he was coming to see me again, I thought it an excellent time to come up here and look over my Chovard tract. He's a very nice young man, and he is very persistent; but he's not the sort I ought to marry."

"I see," said Wayne. "I inquired about this because I wondered if you could go back. Now that I know you can, my best advice to you is to get off at the next stop and either return home, or, if you are positively set on going to Ungava, secure an out-

fit and some friend who is familiar with the locality to come with you."

"Yes, I know," she answered. "It's very kind of you to advise; but I'm determined to—to go it wholly on my own, as they say; though, of course, I'll have to hire a guide after I reach the end of the rail line."

"Oh well, if you're stubborn," Wayne had started to say, his mind filled more with disgust at such colossal innocence than anything else, when a hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned and looked up. It was Black who had come back from the other end of the car.

CHAPTER III

A PROPOSITION

"Excuse me for interrupting your conversation, Yeatman," said Black. "But will you give me about ten minutes of your time? I want to put an important business proposition up to you."

"Sure," answered Wayne, arising as he made his excuses to the young woman.

"Let's sit here," said Black, taking a seat a short way down the aisle and throwing over a seat opposite into which Wayne dropped.

"I've been thinking about that land of yours up at Big Loon," said Black, leaning forward and speaking in a low tone. "Why not sell it to me? I'll give you a reasonable figure for your claim to the thousand acres before I know whether there's any copper there or not, just to round out the Black-Downey section into which yours cuts. What do you say?"

Wayne's every sense became acutely alert. Not having any money to develop it himself—if there was copper there—he would, an hour ago, have grasped eagerly at almost any sort of an offer. But now, after what the girl had told him, it was entirely

another story. Though he could not have explained exactly why, he seemed to feel that, if there was going to be any dispute over who really owned this parcel of land, he would much rather the girl had it out with him, rather than with the dark and sinister featured Black whom he had distrusted from the first.

"Nope," he said laconically. "Guess I'll have to keep the tract."

Black eyed him closely. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Got your papers all right and with you, haven't you?"

Wayne had his papers; they were folded into his money belt, but something, perhaps because his show life had made him naturally suspicious of every stranger, and because he sensed in Black's talk the presence of an African in the fuel pile, made him dodge.

"No, they're in a safety deposit box at Quebec."

Black became effusive. "Oh, we can fix that all right, then," he said offhandedly, rocking his head. "Get off at the next stop, take a train back and arrange the matter in Quebec inside of twenty-four hours. I'll give you twenty thousand dollars for the tract."

Twenty dollars an acre! Wayne almost laughed, and his usual limit was an infrequent smile.

Yesterday, he would have grabbed like a starving man at ten! And considered himself one of the most fortunate mortals on earth. Then, he had no certain idea whether there were even signs of copper on his land. Now, if Black was willing to pay twenty thousand for it, he was positive there must be copper there, perhaps millions of tons. This was something like!

"Don't believe I want to sell at any figure—not until I've looked the land over, anyway," he said.

Black appeared dumfounded. "See here, Yeatman," he urged earnestly. "Nobody knows whether or not there's an ounce of copper on your claim, I give you my word for that: under those circumstances, I'm making you a mighty liberal offer."

"If there's no certainty of copper, why are you so hungry to buy it?"

Black's eyes shifted out the window a moment, came back, and met Wayne's.

"I'm just gambling that there *may* be copper there," he said, tapping Wayne's knee with a long brown finger. "And, as I said before, I want to round out our section. I'll give you twenty five thousand—cash."

"No use," answered Wayne. "I'm not ready to sell."

For a moment Black fidgeted in his seat and it

seemed as if he were going to flare up and get angry. Then he secured control of himself and said, as he arose from the seat:

"Well, promise me you'll give us the first chance, anyway, Yeatman. We can live if we don't buy your land; but I certainly would like to round out ours, and your thousand acres will just do the trick."

"Can't make any promises till I look it over," answered Wayne.

Black made a helpless gesture, as if to say: "This man is an utter fool," and left the car.

Wayne watched him go with a perplexed mind. What was in the air? Something tremendously big, of that he was certain. The reports he had originally picked up about copper in the Loon Lake district had not been particularly optimistic, just copper there, perhaps valuable, if copper ever approached a price where it would pay to mine it and to find some way of freighting the metal to Arleen, the then nearest railroad point. All very vague, yet here was Black, of the Black-Downey interests—whatever they were, Wayne wished he knew more about them —willing to bid $25,000 for land which they, or, at least Black, claimed to know very little about.

"One thing," Wayne mused. "I've got to keep that man Black away from that girl. If he once gets acquainted with her and she really has an any-

where near reasonable claim to the Chovard tract, she'd likely jump at any offer he'd make her."

Then: "Wait a minute; would she? She may not be such an innocent as she appears. There's something about her I haven't quite got yet. She looks and talks, most of the time, like nothing but a soft baby-doll; yet that quietly courageous act of slipping the automatic into my hand when those Italians had me down was no baby-doll play; it was the act of a woman, a woman with a head on her shoulders, and nerve, too. If one of those Italians had been next to what she was doing they'd have smashed her in a second."

He glanced up the aisle to where she sat, interest again buried in her book, apparently oblivious to the fact that there was a soul in the car save herself. He recalled now the title of the volume she had been reading: *"The Psychology Of Faith And Fear."* He had expected it would be a story of the Pollyanna order.

"Deep stuff," he reflected. "There *must* be something to her if she can digest that Freudian brand of literature."

The train stopped and began to back into a siding. Wayne thrust his head out of the window. They were at a tiny log station on which he could see the name, Green's Coulé. He recalled that it was the

last stop before Arleen, the end of the line. He wondered what they were backing into the siding for; surely it could not be to allow another train to pass, for there were but two trains a week each way, and they had already passed the down train.

But mildly interested, he was watching a couple of young French-Canadians engaged in a good natured tussle just inside the station doorway, when he became aware that the front part of the train was drawing away from his car, its speed increasing every minute. It was already several hundred feet away.

A look of profound disgust overspread Wayne's features as he hurried to the door and stepped out on the front platform.

"Stung!" he muttered. "It was as easy as filching peanuts from a blind elephant. I'll bet a red apple Black is at the bottom of this; put up a job with the conductor to stall me here."

He pondered a moment, looking back through the aisle of the car. The Italians had decamped quietly by the rear door sometime before; they were probably on the moving train now, going to Arleen. The only two people left were Wayne and the girl.

"Black probably thought she was with me," reflected Wayne. "Well, I can only make the best of it."

He reëntered the car. The girl looked up with a friendly smile as she inquired:

"Why are we waiting here so long?"

He dropped into the seat beside her and explained matters. She did not seem greatly troubled.

"But surely there must be some way of going on," she offered. "Isn't there another train?"

"Next week Tuesday," he answered. "But I've no intention of waiting for that. I intend going on to-day, somehow, if I have to foot it. It isn't that I'm in such a devil of a hurry as it is the idea of letting Black do me. If you're still set on making your way to the Big Loon Lake country, you'd better throw in your lot with me. I'll go out and see what I can do toward securing a conveyance to take us to Arleen."

He had started away when she caught his arm.

"Wait a moment, please," she said, studying his face. "A short time ago you asked me several direct questions and I answered them frankly. Now I want to ask you some; will you answer them?"

"Don't know until I hear them," he replied. "But shoot, anyway."

She met his glance squarely. "Are you well supplied with funds?"

He colored like a boy caught stealing fruit.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Well, you're not clothed exactly like a man with plenty of money. I gathered the idea that perhaps you were out of funds."

For a second he was almost angry, not at her question, but at her assumption that he would be such a simpleton as to come up into Ungava dressed other than as he was.

"The little fool expected I'd have on a red hunting coat, varnished boots, and a tweed hat with a green feather in it," he thought. "She's the absolute limit!"

Aloud he said, "Great cats, miss, you didn't suppose I'd be dressed like a fashion plate, did you? Even if I had all the money on earth I hope I'm not such a dumb-bell as to come into this country wearing anything except the roughest outfit I own."

It was she who colored now, and she drew in her feet so that her French heeled shoes and silk hose were somewhat less conspicuous.

"That's a dig at me," she said with a little pout. "Perhaps I'm not properly clothed for the trip, but it isn't necessary to rub it in."

"I'm not rubbing it in," he answered. "I'm just explaining one reason why *I'm* clothed as I am. But, to be frank with you, while I've money enough to take me to the end of the rail line, unless some-

thing turns up there, I shall have to work or beat my way if I go any farther."

Her face became suddenly alight.

"Look as if you were glad of it," he offered a little sulkily.

"Perhaps I am," she answered. "For, now that I know your circumstances, I can make you an offer that I hope you'll accept."

"Well," he said, "spring it."

"To begin with," she said, "I realize now that I'm terribly unprepared for the trip I have planned."

"Terribly is right," he declared, half under his breath.

She frowned. "Please don't interrupt me. I should have sought the advice, before starting, of someone who knows the country and how to get along in it. But I didn't and here I am, and I've no idea of turning back. I'll go through, even though I have to go all the way in these."

She stuck out one high heeled shoe and looked at it ruefully with a little moue.

"Now you evidently know how to get along and take care of yourself in this country, but you're broke—or pretty near it. I don't know how to get along, but I have ample funds; suppose you manage the journey for me, while I finance it?"

Wayne gasped. She, who might yet come to dis-

pute his claim to the thousand acres he thought he owned in the Big Loon Lake district, was making this proposition to him, Wayne Yeatman! And she had known him but a few hours. Was she a fool, or was she a very wise young person or what the devil was she? It was queer.

"Of course I'll probably be a terrific burden to you, and I'm likely to bore you to extinction with my chatter," she continued. "But, honestly, I want to learn how to rough it, and I promise to be no more of a burden than I can help, and you must permit me to finance everything."

"Oh, that's all right," he answered. "If I accept I'll let you pay the bills and I'll not allow you to be too much of a burden."

"Do you mean that for a threat or a promise?" she returned quickly.

"I expect we'd better call it a promise," he said. "I'm not in the habit of threatening women; it only makes them want harder to do what you're trying to stop them from doing."

"And you accept?" she asked eagerly.

He pondered a moment. "I'll let you know when I come back from seeing what arrangements I can make about going on."

He left the car. She again became absorbed in her book.

"One thing I'll say for that kid," he thought. "Nothing on earth seems to phase her—not if she can get a chance to powder that pretty nose of hers. Gosh! how that nose does worry her. If mine bothered me one tenth as much I swear I'd have it amputated."

Then: "Wonder what her name is. I don't even know that yet, and here I'm considering piloting this Flossie of Fifth Avenue up through Hell's Doorway. Good God—and several more yards of the same. That sweetly innocent manner of hers will be constantly cutting against my grain: keep me nerved up all the time; I'll want to beat her—and I can't.

"Then, too, there's bound to be trouble between me and Bill Black; he intends to prevent my reaching Loon Lake—and she'll be a continual drag on me in that. Still and all, her proposal to finance the trip helps me to hurdle a lot of my difficulties; suppose I ought to consider that side of the matter. Oh, damn!"

Wayne went to hunt up the Green's Coulé station agent thoroughly vexed with himself. Had a man made the proposition this girl had, he could have said yes or no easily enough; but there was something about her that caused him to feel wholly different. She was helpless, but there was more than that

to it, and the fact that he could not understand just what the added factors were increased Wayne's anger with himself, made it just so much more difficult for him to decide.

CHAPTER IV

A MESSAGE

INSIDE of half an hour Wayne was back at the stalled railway car.

"Just as I thought," he said as he sank into a seat beside the girl. "They dropped this car here intending to pick it up on the next down trip. The station agent says they always do it if a car is almost empty along toward the end of the line; to save haulage. The agent was dumfounded when he found there were two passengers aboard, yet the conductor must have known. I figure it's a put-up job on the part of that man Black."

"The person who called you away when you were talking to me?" she asked.

"Yes." Wayne eyed her sharply. "Ever see him before?"

"Not that I recall," she answered. "And I think I should remember him had I seen him; he looks so much like an Indian."

"Watch your step with him," cautioned Wayne.

"Now about going on. There's a man boards with the station agent owns a couple of mules and does some freighting. He'll carry us to Arleen for eight dollars; he said fifteen at first, but I beat him down to eight, and it's an unadulterated hold-up at that, but the only thing we can do."

She glanced up eagerly. "Then you have decided to accept my offer?"

"As far as Arleen; then we'll see."

"At least that's something," she said. "I shall depend on you to make every arrangement and you'd better take this."

She began fumbling about in her handbag, finally pulled out a big roll of bills and handed it to him.

He stared at it. There looked to be at least a thousand dollars.

"Ye gods! Handing a tent showman her roll!" he reflected. "And she carried it loose in her handbag, as though it were as valuable as a paper of pins. It's a wonder she ever got it as far as here."

Aloud he said, "Do you usually carry your funds like that?"

She looked up innocently. "I've never lost anything yet." Then she added with a little frown, as she caught his censure: "I know I'm green and unsophisticated, but, if I do things wrong, please don't criticize me; just tell me how to do them right.

That's the bargain I made with you, to teach me how to get on in this country."

"Oh, all right," he answered. "I'll begin now. You've got to discard those spangles, wear different clothes. After you've been jolted fifteen miles over a tote road behind a pair of mangy mules in a springless wagon, those overture duds you've got on will make you look like a butterfly that's been through a cloudburst. The station agent's wife, Mrs. Cavanaugh, had a sister from the States come up to visit her last fall, and she left a lot of outdoor clothes here when she went home. I judge she was about your size and I've bargained with Mrs. Cavanaugh to let you have them. You'd better go and get into them; we leave for Arleen in thirty minutes."

He pocketed the money, picked up her two suitcases, carried them outside the car and toward a log shack at the rear of the station.

"If you take my advice," he said, "you'll leave all your fancy clothes and gew-gaws with Mrs. Cavanaugh. You'll have no use for them where you're going—and you may not always be lucky enough to find a man to freight your traps for you."

She looked at him, blankly and with a helpless gesture.

"Do you mean to leave *all* my nice clothes and

things here?" she asked, the tears almost in her eyes.

"Exactly that," he answered brusquely. "If you continue on after we reach Arleen, the biggest part of the way will be on the river, by canoe, boat or raft."

He glanced scornfully at the blouse she wore. "How long do you expect a pink crepe-de-chine waist—if that's what you call that material—would last in a half mile stretch of river rapids, you clinging to a raft for dear life with your toes and finger nails, drenched with spray, expecting every second to be lammed off into a whirlpool that would suck you under and smother you as easy as it would a helpless chipmunk?"

"I don't know what a chipmunk is," she answered with some dignity. "But quite naturally, one doesn't fancy the idea of leaving *all* one's decent clothes behind, wherever one intends going."

For the last hour Yeatman's temper, never any too placid, had been steadily getting more and more frayed; now he was close to losing it entirely.

"The blamed fool," he thought. "One! One! That 'one' gets my goat; it's worse than that eternal powdering her nose; I've got to show her, and it might as well be here and now."

He slammed the two suit-cases to the ground.

"Look here, miss," he snapped. "If we are going into this thing together, we might as well understand each other. By the way, what in hell—what is your name, anyway?"

She looked at him a moment without answering. Then:

"It's Cecile Dennison." She spoke it sweetly, using her best Billie Burke stare, always heretofore effective in calming the male temper. Both weapons of defense—or is it offense?—were destined to carom off Wayne Yeatman at the present moment as easily as would water off a swan's back.

"Cecile!" he snorted. "I might have suspected it. Well, I don't like your flossy name, and from now on, I'm going to call you kid; get that, kid? And if you and I expect to travel peacefully together, you've got to do exactly as I say without any more quibbling or questioning."

He paused a moment, frowning down on her as she sat on one of the suit-cases. Then he barked:

"What's the matter, lost your voice? Why don't you say something?"

When Wayne Yeatman spoke, he was accustomed to getting either action or an answer; ordinarily, failing of both, he would have swung into action himself. Now, as she stared into his face with suddenly narrowing, acutely appraising eyes, he felt a

strange inward sense of diffidence that was wholly new to him.

"Of course, since you understand this country," she said finally, "I realize that I must do as you say; but I think you might, at least, be a bit more gentlemanly in expressing your desires."

"No," he snapped, with emphasis on the adjectives, "I don't intend to be gentlemanly; I intend to be decent and man-like—s' long as you behave. And you might as well understand first as last that when things don't go my way I can show a temper that will fry eggs. If you don't like it, you'll have to lump it—or dissolve the partnership. That's all."

He picked up the suit-case. "Now come on, kid; we haven't any time to waste if you're going to change your clothes and be ready to start when that mule driver is."

He conducted her to the station agent's shack, left her and her suit-cases with Mrs. Cavanaugh and went outside.

He had waited perhaps twenty minutes when he heard the door behind him open. He turned and stared, at first thinking the person he saw there was a stranger; then he realized that it was Miss Dennison, but what a change!

She had on a loose khaki colored, many pocketed hunting jacket, blood stained in several places and

somewhat the worse for wear; a pair of khaki riding breeches, tan cordovan puttees and heavy, hob-nailed shoes. She had done up her flame-of-gold hair in two close pleats and wound them about her head. Her hands were encased in a pair of buckskin gaunts.

"That's more like it," thought Wayne as he surveyed her with keen and critical glance. "If she only had a little color in that face of hers she'd begin to resemble a real person."

She caught his look and tossed her head.

"Do I appear rough and disreputable enough to satisfy you now?"

"You'll do," he answered curtly. "Where's your traps?"

She pointed to the suit-cases just inside the doorway. She had been happily disappointed in these clothes; she knew now that she looked at least striking, if not dashingly handsome in them, and she had expected him to say something to that effect. She had rarely before met men who failed to compliment her when she looked well.

Wayne hipped his hands and gazed at the suit-cases with a scowl. It was evident that she had not profited by his advice about leaving all her elaborate clothes behind. She watched him, a defiant gleam in her eyes that ought to have been a warning but wasn't.

He picked up one of the cases and slammed it back inside the hallway.

"There!" he barked. "You'll leave that behind. One is enough for you—and about a half more than you'll have any use for."

A second she stared at him, her eyes blazing; then, as she picked up the case he had discarded:

"There are things in that suit-case that I shall need; if you're not strong enough to carry it, I am."

He was about to answer, then decided not to, took the case from her hand and tossed them both into the wagon as the mule driver and his rig came around the corner of the shack. "First blood for her," he thought. "She's got me buffaloed."

All of Wayne's outfit had been carried to Arleen on the train, so there was no other luggage save Miss Dennison's two suit-cases. The mule driver, whose name was Sam Pelby, a tall, bony individual, glanced at these with deep scorn as Wayne assisted their owner onto the rear seat.

"Looks like you newlyweds ain't goin' up outfitted very heavy," commented Pelby as he stowed away the suit-cases.

"Heavy enough," answered Wayne curtly. "And for your private information, driver, let me add that this young woman and I are not newlyweds. She has hired me to look out for her as far as Arleen

because she happened to get left behind on the train, that's all—but don't forget it."

"Oh! Not newlyweds," said Pelby with a poorly concealed sneer.

Wayne was disliking this fellow Pelby, evidently in a bad temper because of having been beaten down in his price for the trip, more every moment. Yet he knew better than to begin an argument while the man was their only means of reaching Arleen.

"Later, I'll give this bird a piece of my mind," he thought.

They started. The tote road proved to be, during the first part of their journey, in reasonably good condition. But there were mosquitoes and there was a particularly insistent pest which the Indians of that locality call no-see-ums, a tiny fly that got in their nostrils and their eyes and was even more irritating than the larger insects.

The distance to Arleen was about twenty-five miles. Pelby's mules, accustomed to carrying heavy loads of freight, seldom did more than seven miles an hour, so that it would require at least three hours for them to reach there.

During the first hour there was no conversation; the passengers were too busy fighting the mosquitoes and flies, while most of Pelby's energy was devoted to cursing the laziness of his mule team. Finally

the sun dropped lower, it became cooler and the insects less ravenous.

They had been jogging slowly on for perhaps two hours when Wayne's keen ear caught the sound of rapid hoof beats at the rear. He turned as a single rider, a boy, came into sight around a bend, waving an arm and shouting. Pelby also turned.

"It's young Dan Cavanaugh," he said. "Wonder what he wants? Must be we forgot something." Pelby drew the mules to a halt.

The boy came up, thrust a yellow envelope toward Pelby, saying breathlessly:

"Dad got a message for you; made me bring it on; said it was terribly important."

Pelby's face was a picture of surprise. "Who the devil's sending a message to me. I warn't expectin' any."

He tore open the envelope and began to read it. Then Wayne, watching him, saw the man's eyes shift slowly beneath half lowered lids and glance covertly toward Miss Dennison—then back to the message.

Wayne's muscles became suddenly taut, as they had when he expected treachery from some animal he was training.

"What's up?" he thought. "Something, I'll bet a red apple. And if I ever saw the look in a man's

eyes that means he's planning to double-cross you in about two seconds, it was in Pelby's then."

He leaned forward, attempting to get a glimpse of the message, had just caught the name Black signed to it when Pelby folded the paper quickly, thrust it into his pocket and began to turn his mules about as he said, with an altogether too obvious attempt to speak nonchalantly:

"Sorry for you folks, but I've got to go back. I'll take you on again tomorrow morning."

He began shouting "Haw! Haw!" and yanking viciously at the mules who were evidently averse to turning in a spot where the tote road was deeply gullied and there was a sharp declivity at the left.

Wayne made a sudden determination. Having attained thus far on this journey, he did not intend to be balked in reaching Arleen that night, not by any message from Black, anyway.

The thought flashed through his brain: "This thing is deeper than it looks on the surface; Black is taking altogether too much trouble to gain a mere visionary copper prospect."

Whipping Miss Dennison's automatic from his pocket, he pressed the cold muzzle against Pelby's abdomen.

"Not now, you're not going to turn back," he

snapped. "You've bargained to carry us to Arleen; you're more than half way there; keep on."

Filled with surprise, Pelby gave an extra vicious yank on the rein of the nigh mule. The animal whirled sharply, the wheels cranked and the wagon overturned.

In a breath, Wayne found himself on the ground, Pelby on top of him. At the same moment he heard Miss Dennison utter a terrified scream and saw, in the gathering dusk, the blurred shadow of the mule team crashing over the declivity at the left and disappearing.

CHAPTER V

HELL'S DOORWAY

PELBY had secured a grip on Wayne's automatic and was attempting to wrench it from his hand when Wayne's left fist found its mark and the mule driver sank back inert on the earth.

Wayne leaped to his feet and his eyes roved the vicinity in search of Miss Dennison. She lay white and still a short distance away. In a bound, he was at her side, chafing her hands, loosening the neck of her hunting jacket.

In spite of him, the touch of her soft warm flesh shot a thrill to his outermost nerve end. With an impatient gesture and a muttered: "I'm not going to make a fool of myself over a damned spoiled kid," he fought down the surge of a feeling he despised.

Finally she stirred and sat up.

"What happened?"

"Nothing much; the wagon overturned and threw you out," he answered. "Are you injured?"

"I—I don't think so," she replied. "But I feel terribly dizzy when I move my head."

"That's nothing," he said. "Sit there a moment and you'll soon be all right. I'm going to look after that mule driver."

Wayne went over to where Pelby lay, the Cavanaugh boy kneeling beside him. Pelby was beginning to recover from the effects of the smashing blow he had received in the face, but was still helpless. Wayne saw the yellow enveloped message protruding from his pocket and pulled it forth. While Pelby lay there groaning that he was killed, he knew he was, Wayne read the message.

It was short, but it held a world of meaning.

"SAM PELBY, Green's Coulé.

"Very important. Hold Yeatman at the Coulé if you have to break both his legs. Let the girl come on. BLACK."

"Let the girl come on." The sentence drummed on Wayne's brain pan like the steady drop of a mighty trip-hammer. What did it mean? Did Black know her? Was he aware that she also laid claim to the Chovard tract in the Big Loon Lake country, or was she, perhaps, in his employ and had that whole business of her boarding the train and enlisting Wayne's interest been a cleverly planned scheme?

"The darn kid doesn't look or act like the sort that would double-cross anybody in a really serious mat-

ter," he thought. "Still and all, you never can tell; they say a man may smile and smile, and be a villain still; I reckon a woman can, too."

He glanced to where she sat. She caught his look and thrust something hastily into the pocket of her hunting jacket. His suspicions suddenly flaming into life, he leaped toward her and gripped the arm still thrust into her pocket.

"What's that you're trying to conceal?" he snapped.

For an instant she stared at him defiantly. Then:

"Please don't be a bigger fool than you can help," she said and withdrew the hand. It contained her powder puff and a tiny mirror.

"Might have known it," he said disgustedly. "It's all of thirty minutes since you powdered that nose of yours."

"Well, it's my nose, isn't it?"

To that he could think of no answer.

He went to the edge of the deep declivity beside the trail. At the bottom he could make out the shadow of the wrecked wagon, near it the two mules, both dead. He pondered a moment.

"Looks like our only chance of getting to Arleen tonight is to hoof it. I wonder if the kid can stand an eight mile hike?"

He threw up his head at a call from young Dan Cavanaugh.

"Sam says his ankle is sprained; help me get him up on the saddle of my horse, will you, so I can carry him back to the Coulé?"

Wayne hurried to where Pelby lay, still groaning, and hastily examined his ankle. Then, aided by the boy, he lifted the mule driver into the saddle. Once there and headed back toward the Coulé, Pelby became defiant.

"Damn you, Yeatman," he snarled malignantly. "You killed my mules, wrecked my wagon and broke my ankle. I'll remember you for this."

"Blame all your trouble on me," answered Wayne. "You're the sort of a sneak would do that. Any time you feel like mixing in, let me know. I'll be there to see you do your stuff."

Pelby and the boy rode away into the darkness. Wayne went to where Miss Dennison was slapping mosquitoes.

"Think you can stand an eight mile hike?" he asked. "Or would you prefer to wait here for the remainder of the night and go on to Arleen in the morning? Our only method of getting there now is to walk."

She pondered the matter a moment. "I don't think the mosquitoes were quite as bad while we

were moving. I believe I prefer to walk on now."

"All right," he answered, picked up the suit cases that had been spilled from the wagon before it toppled over the edge of the declivity and started.

For a while, she walked silently beside him. Then she began to lag.

"Too much for you?" he commented, a little scornfully, waiting for her to come up. "I thought it would be. Want to camp here until morning?"

"It's not too much for me," she whipped out spiritedly. "I'll keep on to Arleen tonight now if I have to finish the journey on my hands and knees."

"Think you're gritty, don't you?" offered Wayne.

Abruptly, and to his utter astonishment, instead of answering him in kind, she dropped beside the trail and burst into tears.

He stared at her a moment. Then:

"What in hell are you crying about?"

Her head jerked up. "None of your business. I guess I can cry if I want to, can't I? Perhaps you'd cry if every muscle in both your legs ached like the toothache."

"No, I wouldn't," he returned gravely. "That would be self pity: something anybody ought to be ashamed of. Besides, wait until sometime when your feet get blistered, every step is agony and all your muscles ache like a thousand decayed teeth. Then

if you still carry through, you'll have something to brag over. You've got to be a smile-if-it-kills-me kid up here."

With a defiant stare, she brushed the tears from her eyes, arose and started on—ahead.

"Going to show me the way," he thought. "Wonder if she can keep it up. Bet a red apple she can't."

Wayne was destined to lose his wager. After a while she appeared to get her second wind and even led the way into Arleen.

They found a hotel where Wayne booked a room for himself and one for Miss Dennison.

"Now I expect you're ready to eat the place out of a week's rations?" he asked. For himself, he was as ravenous as a bear coming from a winter's hibernation.

"Don't mention food to me," she exclaimed indignantly. "The only things I want to see are a bathtub and a bed; after a half hour in the first I'm going to sleep the clock around in the second."

She shot him a glance and disappeared with the bell boy and her suit-cases.

Wayne went to the hotel restaurant and ate and ate. Then he, too, retired, but not to fall immediately into sleep; his mind was too active for slumber.

"What am I going to do about this girl?" he re-

flected. "Pilot her up to the lake and let her contest my claim to the Chovard tract, or hand back her roll, now I've brought her to Arleen, and let her shift for herself?

"There's no doubt about her intentions to get to the lake, even if it takes a leg, and if I keep on at her expense I'm just that much to the good."

He drew the roll of bills from his money belt where he had placed it when getting into bed and counted them. There was $1255.

"Holy cats! I ought to have left this in the hotel safe!" he thought. "Now I shan't dare go to sleep."

But Wayne did sleep, the deep dreamless slumber of infants and healthy, outdoor adults. When he awoke it was daylight and the money was safe.

As he bathed and dressed, he thought, "If I don't look after this kid, somebody else will, and the other fellow may double cross her at the first chance. Guess I'll have to close with her offer, and see what turns up."

Downstairs in the restaurant, he had just had his breakfast order filled and was beginning to eat, when, sitting back to the entrance, he heard two men busily engaged in conversation enter and take seats at a nearby table. Wayne did not turn; he had recognized the voice of one of the men. It was Black of the Black-Downey interests.

"I'm going to ship that gang of Italians down the river this morning," Black was saying. "Dave Trumbell will look after them. You'd better stay on here and keep an eye on things. If anything turns up, and I need more men, I'll find some way of letting you know. Martinelli, the head *padrone* in Quebec, said he could send up a thousand, two thousand, if we needed them. I don't know, but I think we can make enough show for a while with this gang; still, we may need all he can ship us. I intend to go the limit—if it's necessary."

Wayne strained his ears in an endeavor to hear more, but Black had dropped his voice and the two were talking confidentially.

"Two thousand men! What use can Black have for that number?" thought Wayne. "I'm positive no mine has been opened there yet; it wouldn't be any use, no way of getting the ore out to a smelter even if it were high grade stuff."

Wayne finished his breakfast and lingered, smoking a cigarette. He wanted Black and his companion to leave the room first and hoped to avoid their attention. Finally he heard their chairs scraping; but, as they arose, he could make out their footsteps coming directly toward his table. No chance to escape a meeting now, he thought.

CHAPTER VI

HAMPEX

The two men were about to pass Wayne's table when Black happened to glance casually that way. He halted, stared a brief second, then advanced with outstreched hand.

"Hello, Yeatman," he called. "Was looking for you last night, but the train conductor said you must have been left behind by accident at Green's Coulé. He sent the brakeman in to tell you that car was to be dropped there, but the chap forgot it. How'd you get in?"

"Blamed liar," thought Wayne. "Does he suppose I'm fool enough to swallow that hokum?"

Aloud he said, ignoring Black's outthrust hand: "I got in all right—and with neither leg broken—yet."

Black gave a perceptible start. Wayne's remark made it obvious that he had read the message sent to Pelby, yet Black was too wise a diplomat to pick up the matter.

"Lucky boy," he said with a forced laugh. "Going down the river, I suppose?"

"Planning to," answered Wayne curtly.

"Got your transportation engaged?"

"Not yet."

"Better get a move on, then." With which remark Black turned with his companion and left the restaurant.

Wayne watched him go with a puzzled frown.

"Wonder what Black means," he thought.

He arose from the table, paid his check and went to the hotel desk. The hour was early and the night man was still on. Wayne had rather taken a fancy to the chap on the evening before; he was pleasant, accommodating and looked brightly intelligent.

"Bill Black stopping here?" asked Wayne.

The clerk nodded. "Just went out."

Wayne leaned closer. "What's his game up in the Big Loon Lake country?"

The clerk smiled. "Wish I knew, brother, I'd follow his lead. No Black-Downey wheel ever turns unless there's grist in the mill. Going up?"

Wayne nodded. "What's the best way to travel?"

"Canoe, if you're alone," answered the clerk. "Raft, if you've got a party."

"For two, say, or possibly three; two men and a woman?" said Wayne.

The clerk lifted an expressive eyebrow. "For a woman, I'd say afoot. The annual death toll on the

river during the season has seldom been less than a dozen men; in heavy seasons more. If the rapids don't keep up the average, the falls are sure to."

"Still and all, I'm afraid I shall have to chance the river trip," said Wayne thoughtfully. "You see, I'm in something of a hurry. Where will I be likely to find a man that knows the stream and will take care of my party?"

"There's usually dozens around the river front will jump at the job, but they're not all men I'd want to hire. Ever hear of Rouge Dubois?"

Wayne shook his head.

"Best man on the river—if you can get him; knows every ripple from here to Big Loon Lake—and beyond."

Wayne left the hotel and went toward the river front. Usually, at this season of the year, a goodly share of the traffic was toward Arleen, men coming out of the country before winter froze it up; but now Wayne found the place as hummingly busy as a hive of bees. And now he understood Black's last remark.

Customarily, a journey to Ungava is referred to as going "up there," probably because it is up on the map. As a matter of fact, however, the current of the Marquette flows down all the way to where it empties into Big Loon Lake.

It was Black's Italians going down stream made the usually dull place busy today. Twenty rafts had been built for the transportation of themselves and their goods and when Wayne discovered that at least one experienced river man would be needed to pilot each raft, he began to realize how slim were his own chances of securing a guide. He inquired of several men regarding the whereabouts of Rouge Dubois.

"Went down the river several weeks ago; hasn't come back yet; lost in the rapids, mebbe, I don't know," was the most definite information Wayne could dig up after much questioning.

The first raft loads of Italians were due to embark around noon and Wayne discovered that every available guide had been engaged to pilot their crafts. It looked as if he would have to wait or chance it without a guide.

He returned to the hotel in rather low spirits. As he came in the day clerk beckoned to him.

"Tom Porteous, the night clerk, wants to see you," he said. "He's in room two hundred and one."

Wayne hurried upstairs and knocked at room 201, totally unaware of what a tremendous influence on future events the coming interview with Porteous was to have.

"Just the man I want to see," said Porteous,

throwing open the door. "Come in. I was afraid you wouldn't get back before I left."

The young man's eyes were shining and he appeared excited. Over his shoulder Wayne caught sight of a trunk and a suit-case in process of being packed.

"What's up?" he asked.

Porteous closed the door and drew Wayne to the far end of the room.

"Don't want anybody to listen in on our talk," he said. "Ever hear of the Hampton Exploration Company?"

Wayne shook his head.

"Inhale these horrible details, then," said Porteous. "Hampex has been one of the perennial footballs of the New York curb market for the past five years. H. P. Hampton, the big promoter, started the company with the intention of using it to develop some Quebec ore leases he thought looked promising, but the plan fizzled out, never amounted to a picayune. The original capitalization was for a million shares at fifty dollars par. Almost any time within the last year or so you could pick up all you wanted on the curb—it never had anything but curb listing, as it was purely speculative—for anywhere from four cents a share to four cents a bale. Men bought the pretty things to paper their dens with.

"So far, so good; now I've got a tip from down home that the Black-Downey interests are quietly absorbing all the Hampex stock they can lay their hands on."

"Well, what of it?" said Wayne, unable to see any point in Porteous' talk. "If the Hampton Exploration Company was started to develop certain Quebec mining properties, what has that got to do with the Big Loon Lake country where the Black-Downey attention seems to be centered now?"

"Sweet cement! Can't you see? That's precisely where the catch comes," answered Porteous. "Hampex has got a charter that beats Bay State Gas a mile for being wide open. They're organized to develop ore territory anywhere on earth, *anywhere on earth,* get that? Licensed to engage in almost any business they care to from potting ham to salvaging skyscrapers. About the only thing they haven't got a license for is to commit murder and engage in highway robbery, though Hampex came pretty close to the last several times—and they don't own a penny's worth of property anywhere; all their leases expired two years ago."

"Then, according to your idea, the Black-Downey interests are accumulating Hampex because they've got hold of something tremendously big in the Loon

Lake district and intend to use Hampex to finance it?" asked Wayne.

"I should think so," answered Porteous. "And, such being the case, I intend to sink every penny I possess, or can beg, borrow or steal, in Hampex stock. It looks to me like a pipe, a pippin, a cinch, and I'll either make my everlasting fortune or go cheerfully to the slaughter."

Wayne's eyes began to glow, but not with enthusiasm; it was suspicion caused that dark red gleam in their ruby depths, suspicious of Porteous.

"The damn fool takes me for a sap," he was thinking. "This story of his has Bill Black written all over it. Wants to get me out of the country and thinks his phony tale will do it."

Then, on second thought, "Still and all, I don't know. I'm blamed if I don't like this chap, Porteous. He's kiddish, but he don't look like a crook, nor like a chap Black could twist around his finger for any funny business. I'll play him a little."

Aloud he said, watching Porteous' face closely:

"Look here, how'd you get this tip, and why are you spilling it to me, a total stranger?"

Porteous looked mysterious. "I can't tell you how I got the tip; it's a confidential source," he answered. "But it came pretty straight from the Black-Downey brokers in New York."

"I'll bet it did," thought Wayne. "Direct—through Bill Black."

"As to why I'm giving it to you," continued Porteous, "I'm rather gregarious myself and I don't exactly fancy the idea of going down to New York to buck the curb market alone. You struck me as being a regular fellow, and I thought maybe you'd like the idea of trailing along with me, trying your luck a little. Financially, I'm reasonably well fixed at present—I took this hotel job merely for the experience and to see the country—and if you're short, I'll stake you."

Rolling a cigarette with lowered eyes, Wayne studied the matter. On the face of it, this was a remarkably generous offer. Apparently Porteous had taken as much of a liking to him as he had to Porteous. Yet a hard life, the greater part of it spent among rough men whose code of existence was to distrust everybody, caused Wayne Yeatman's suspicions to be always on the alert for an attack or a surprise, as he had been forced to be with his brute pupils.

Porteous, watching him, evidently sensed this distrust, for he suddenly thrust forward his hand with a winning smile as he said earnestly:

"Don't blame you for hanging back, Yeatman, but I give you my word this thing is straight as a string."

For once, as he met that infectious smile and noted the clean, frank manner of the young man before him, Wayne Yeatman's suspicions were lulled to rest.

He answered Porteous' glance with one equally frank as he accepted the hand and shook it heartily.

"I guess you're all right, boy, and I'm grateful for your confidence. But I can't go to New York. What you've told me makes me only so much more anxious to get into the Big Loon Lake district."

Porteous stared at him a second, as if suddenly struck with an idea.

"Sweet cement! You don't happen to own any land up there, do you?" he exclaimed.

"Sure do," answered Wayne. "A thousand acres, more or less."

"Anywhere near Black's claim?"

"Adjoining."

Porteous was about to make a further remark when Wayne cut in with:

"Wait a minute. You said 'Black's *claim*'; hasn't he got a clear title to his property up there?"

"Not yet," answered Porteous. "It's in the courts; there's a squatter's claim against it, and, as you probably know, squatter's claims in the Canadian courts are looked upon as being pretty strong, especially if the original owner has neglected his stake and made no development."

"I see," said Wayne thoughtfully. He was beginning to gain a clearer view of that African in the fuel pile whose presence he had suspected since first meeting Black. "I'm glad you told me this; the facts may be useful to me later; but I'm mighty sorry I can't go into your curb market scheme," he added with genuine regret.

"That's all right," said Porteous. "If I owned a thousand acres next door to any Black-Downey property I'd want to camp on it night and day for the next six months, or at least until I knew exactly what Bill Black was up to. When do you start down the river?"

Wayne spoke dubiously. "Can't say. Black has engaged every guide for the rafts his Italians are going down on and I couldn't seem to locate your friend Rouge Dubois."

A queer look overspread Porteous' face. He stared thoughtfully out of the window a moment, then turned again toward Wayne.

"See here, Yeatman," he said, "I'm putting a devil of a lot of trust in you and I don't know why it is, but I've felt pretty sure all along that you were pure white and would keep anything I told you under your hat."

"I'm not a man with a loose mouth," answered Wayne quietly.

Porteous laughed genially. "No, that's evident. I've told you my affairs freely but you haven't spilled much about your own. But that's all right. Perhaps I'm sometimes apt to impart confidence too easily myself, when I like a man. Anyway, I'm going to tell you something else that I want you to keep under your hat."

Wayne nodded. "You can tell it safely."

"Rouge Dubois is in town; but he's got a broken leg and he doesn't want Bill Black to know he's here: he had some sort of trouble with Black's men up country. With his smashed limb, Dubois couldn't, of course, guide you down the river himself, but I have an idea he might put you next to some one who can."

"Where can I find Dubois?" asked Wayne.

Porteous waited a moment before answering. Finally:

"I'll give you a note to him and directions how to find the place, but don't go there until after dark."

"I wanted to start today if I could," said Wayne.

"You'll be wise to put it off until tomorrow," answered Porteous. "Those rafts of Black's will clutter up the stream for a mile."

"I see," said Wayne. "Maybe you're right. Anyway, I'll be tremendously grateful to you for a note to Rouge Dubois."

Porteous sat down at a table, pulled paper and pencil from a drawer and began to write.

Wayne watched him with intent eyes. Would he seal the letter? Had he done so, Wayne's suspicions would have been immediately aroused; but Porteous did not seal the envelope, he merely thrust the sheet inside, folded over the flap and handed the envelope to Wayne with directions how to find Rouge Dubois' stopping place.

"Rouge will fix you up if he can," concluded Porteous. "He'll do a lot for me, and I've written a strong word for you."

Wayne left Porteous' room and went downstairs. He was passing the entrance to the hotel restaurant when he chanced to glance inside, halted, and drew hastily back.

Seated at a table, busily engaged in conversation, were Bill Black and Cecile Dennison. Dressed in a stylish traveling suit, she was eating; Black wasn't.

As Wayne watched them, he saw Black hand Miss Dennison a paper which she signed and returned to him, receiving in exchange a roll of bills. Black then left her and went to another table where his own lunch was waiting.

Boiling mad, filled with infinite disgust, Wayne turned away and sank into a chair in the hotel lobby.

"The damned little simpleton," he thought. "She's

probably signed away everything but the clothes on her back. After my warning her against Black, too. Well, here's where I quit her, but I'll hand her a piece of my mind first, the minute she leaves that restaurant."

CHAPTER VII

BLACK'S TRICK

For half an hour Wayne Yeatman fumed and fretted, smoked innumerable cigarettes and waited for Cecile Dennison to conclude her lunch.

As it happened, it was Black who finished first. Leaving the restaurant, he came directly to where Wayne was sitting, dropped into a chair and proceeded to light a cigar, a remarkably good one as Wayne noted from the odor.

"Hello, Yeatman," he said. "Saw you passing the restaurant doorway while I was talking to your friend in there. She was telling me about her counter claim to the Chovard tract in the Big Loon Lake district. Suppose you know about that?"

Wayne, controlling an almost irresistible impulse to rise and choke the man where he sat, merely nodded and threw away his cigarette with a gesture of deep dislike.

"Reckon then, since you know there's a counter claim, you'll feel more like taking up with my offer," said Black. "It's still open, twenty-five thousand dollars."

His mind beset by a dozen puzzling problems, Wayne's brain began working with lightning rapidity. If Black still wanted to buy his claim, it seemed clear that he had not bought Miss Dennison's. What, then, had been the meaning of that passage of money and a signed paper between them? And, if Black was still willing to pay twenty-five thousand for Wayne's tract, was it because of his faith in the validity of that claim, or because he considered the sum a cheap price to pay in buying out the possibility of a long money-eating lawsuit to decide which claim actually was valid?

"I'd heard about Miss Dennison's claim to the Chovard tract before," continued Black in a matter of fact tone. "Saw her name on the hotel register this morning, looked her up and made her an offer. But she's more stubborn than you are about selling for a reasonable figure. The best I could do with her was to get a sixty day option at two hundred thousand dollars. That price is a joke, but I may come to it yet—if there's really as much copper as I hope there."

Here was a surprise. Evidently, if he were willing to buy a sixty day option from Cecile Dennison at that huge figure, Black knew more about the Chovard tract than Wayne had ever suspected, and he must regard her claim as the better one. Wayne

would have given considerable to know if Black had told Miss Dennison of his, Wayne's, interest in the Chovard land, and would have attempted to find out, but, just at that moment, he caught sight of that young woman herself preparing to leave the restaurant.

Arising from his chair, he said curtly to Black:

"No, my thousand acres in the Loon Lake district isn't for sale now, and I don't think it ever will be. The more I consider it, and the more anxious I see you are to buy it, the better I like that piece of real estate. If it's worth twenty-five thousand to you, it's certainly worth that to me."

Black, who had also observed Miss Dennison leaving the restaurant, chuckled. "Suspect you're likely to change your mind before long."

Wayne confronted Cecil Dennison in the restaurant doorway, his lips sternly set, his eyes glowing.

"I'd like a few moments' talk with you, please," he said.

She met his glance, first with a smile, then her smile vanished and a look of smoldering defiance stole into her eyes.

"Well, what is it?" she asked coldly.

"No, not here," he answered. "There are too many people about. We'd better go outside, if you don't mind walking."

A faint wave of color stole into her pale cheeks.

"You needn't twit me about last night," she countered spiritedly. "I've fully recovered from my fatigue and, anyway, I stuck it out, didn't I?"

"Sure you stuck it out, but it was temper, not grit, made you do it. Why didn't you show some of that spirit with Bill Black? After my warning you against him, too?"

They were on the street, going toward the river front. She halted and confronted him.

"What do you mean?"

"You gave him a first option on the Chovard tract for sixty days at two hundred thousand, didn't you?"

"Wasn't that all right?" she asked. "I shall be very glad to sell for that figure if he's ever willing to pay it."

"Wasn't it all right?" he repeated angrily. "You cussed little fool, don't you know that if there's copper on that land, it may be worth millions? That if Bill Black pays you two hundred thousand, it will be because Bill Black knows dead certain that it's worth probably two hundred million. Now you've signed an option to sell at two hundred thousand, and, no matter how much the land turns out to be worth, you've got to sell your claim for that, if Black decides to take up his option within the time limit, sixty days."

Wayne had been growing madder every minute. He had no patience with what he considered such utter stupidity. He would have liked to shake her. And she just stood there and stared at him!

"Well, what the hell you got to say about it?" he blurted out finally.

"I—I don't know," she stammered meekly. "What ought I to say?"

"How the devil do I know what you ought to say," he countered. "But I know what I'm going to say. Here's where you and me part company, and I intend to have the sweet satisfaction of telling you before I quit you that I always knew most women were blamed fools, but you're a bigger blamed fool than I ever believed any woman could be."

He drew her money from his pocket and handed it toward her as he concluded, "That's that—and good-by."

She took the money. He was turning away when she caught his arm.

"Look here," she said. "Don't you think you also are being something of a fool? The thing is done, isn't it, and it can't be undone. I'm not a business woman; how should I have known? Anyway, I don't see any sense in making all this fuss over it now that it's a *fait accompli*."

Her interjection of the French phrase did more

to calm his temper than anything she could have said. The always hidden regret of Wayne Yeatman's life was that he was not an educated man. His feeling toward such things was almost reverence.

One fact her talk had convinced him of. Black had told her nothing of his, Wayne's, claim to the Chovard tract. And, after all, wasn't what she said common sense; could she have been expected to prove a match for Bill Black, the keen brained money juggler, past master in the tricks of his trade?

"Furthermore," she concluded with some dignity, "I quite fail to see what right *you* have to question my actions in the matter."

Her last shot went home. Wayne had no intention of telling her about his inheritance of the Chovard tract, not until he had looked the land over, anyway. Thus, when it came to that, what right had he to question her actions?

She must have caught the indecision in his face, for she went on:

"Don't you think you'd better take back this money and reconsider your resignation? I've been depending on you; you're not very amiable; but you do strike me as being capable. When I make a bargain, I stick to it, and I expect others to do the same."

"I only agreed to look out for you as far as

Arleen," he answered a trifle sulkily. The inference that he was not sticking to his bargain had hurt.

"I know," she answered. "But you half promised to go the remainder of the way, and anyway, I've no one else. The maid at the hotel told me this morning that every capable river guide—and some that are not capable—has been engaged by the Black-Downey company to pilot their Italians down the stream."

"All right," said Wayne, beginning to feel that she was placing him on his honor. "I'll see you through."

"That's much better," she said, handing him back the money he had given her and then drawing another roll of bills from her handbag. "Here's some more you'd better look out for. It's the two thousand dollars Mr. Black paid me for his sixty day option."

"Aren't you afraid to trust a man who confesses to being practically broke with all this cash?" he asked.

"No," she answered. "If you had meant to decamp with it, you'd have done so before this. What are your plans?"

Without betraying any of the confidence Tom Porteous had placed in him, Wayne, as they returned to the hotel, told her that he thought there was some prospect of his finding a guide who would take them

down the river, but that it would not be wise to start until the following morning, as the great number of Black's rafts would congest the river for a long distance.

Arriving at the hotel, Wayne entered the restaurant to eat his lunch, while Miss Dennison went to her room. Lunch concluded, Wayne stopped at the hotel desk to inquire of the day clerk:

"Bill Black checked out yet?"

"Some time ago," answered the clerk. "Think he's gone down the river with that mob of Italians he brought up from Quebec."

Wayne was glad of this. He could now look up Rouge Dubois with a feeling of greater safety. According to his promise to Porteous, however, he waited until evening before starting in search of the French-Canadian guide.

The house proved to be a low frame building on the outskirts of the town. After locating it, Wayne hung about the vicinity for a while to make certain that he had not been followed. Since Dubois did not wish Black to know he was in town, Wayne felt that these precautions were necessary.

Finally he approached and knocked on the only door he could see. There were no lights visible in the building and it was almost five minutes before any response came. At last the door was opened a

crack and a pair of shining eyes peered out, looking him over appraisingly.

"Rouge Dubois live here?" he asked. "If he does, I have a note for him from Tom Porteous at the Hotel Marquette."

A bare, scrawny arm and hand were thrust out to take the envelope and then the door was abruptly closed.

He waited ten minutes. Finally the door was again opened. He saw a withered old woman standing there holding a candle, shading it from the wind with one hand.

"M'sieu will please to enter?" she said.

He entered and followed her along a bleak, uncarpeted hallway, noting that she locked and barred the door behind them.

He began to feel a little uncertain. Might not this be another trap of Black's, some scheme to prevent him from keeping on to the Big Loon Lake district? Yet, when he recalled the frank manner and boyishly honest face of Tom Porteous, it was hard for Wayne to believe that the night clerk had led him into any trap.

CHAPTER VIII

ROUGE DUBOIS

As they arrived at the end of the hallway, the withered crone threw open a door and motioned Wayne Yeatman inside. He entered, expecting she would follow, heard the door behind him close abruptly and found himself in complete darkness.

Instinctively, his every muscle tensed and he was balanced on the balls of his feet, ready for anything, when a powerful electric hand torch was flashed in his face, almost blinding him. Suspicious, expecting treachery at any instant, he had gathered himself to spring toward it when the torch was snapped off and he heard some one say.

"M'sieu, you weel please pardon theese strange welcome. I was not sure whether m'sieu was a friend or an enemy. Now, we shall have some light."

There came the sound of a scratching match and a kerosene lamp was lighted. Wayne's muscles began to relax.

He found himself in a cheaply furnished room. Lying propped up with pillows on a bed at one side

was a giant of a man with pointed beard and darkly tanned weather-beaten features, his right leg in splints. Beside him was a low table on which there was a box of cigarettes, the kerosene lamp and a rifle.

"You are Rouge Dubois?" asked Wayne.

"I am Rouge Dubois," answered the bearded giant. "M'sieu weel please pardon eef I do not rise; my leg she gone bust. Weel not m'sieu take a chair —and a cigarette?"

Wayne found a chair, brought it near the bed, accepted a cigarette and became seated.

"And now m'sieu's errand?" said Dubois.

"I thought Tom Porteous——" Wayne began when Dubois cut him short with a gesture.

"I know, I know; but I prefair to hear it from m'sieu's own lips."

For a moment the two eyed each other. Wayne began to realize that he was under the microscope, that this giant lying on the bed was acutely studying his every word and action.

Instinctively, he had, at first sight, taken a liking to the fellow. Dubois was six feet tall, wore his dark hair long, bound about his forehead with a twisted length of red drill and one sleeve of his wool shirt that had been torn away, disclosed a hugely brown and hairy arm that looked as if it might have felled a moose with a single blow. His cheeks,

above the beard, were darkly red, his eyes beneath heavy brows were sharp and twinkling. He seemed to radiate good nature, yet Wayne could see from the play of his muscles and the swing of his enormous shoulders that here was a man who might be a devil in a fight.

From the waist down, Dubois was clothed in a pair of brown corduroy trousers and a crimson sash; a leg of the trousers had been cut away to adjust the splints on his broken limb. One foot was bare, the other incased in a heavy, well worn moccasin.

Rouge Dubois was a person to remember. At times he got prodigiously drunk—and then kept strictly sober for months. He would strangle a man for an insult or an injury, yet for a friend he would gladly risk his life. He was a giant in everything, a great lover, a great hater. Work, play or fight, he did either for all that was in him, but best he loved a good fight and he could take punishment as well as give it. There was almost no limit to his endurance. The wind swept seas and the wild north breed many such; contact with civilization is apt to spoil them; they cannot breathe and keep themselves except where a never ending battle for life must be waged against the elements.

Very frankly, having decided that, under the circumstances, it was the wisest policy, Wayne ex-

plained to Rouge Dubois about his errand into the Big Loon Lake country and his need for a guide for himself and Miss Dennison.

As he finished, Dubois began to chuckle throatily.

"So m'sieu own de Chovar' trac' an' follow after Beel Black, eh?"

"Yes, but not on Black's invitation," answered Wayne. "In fact, I've already gathered that Black may do all he can to prevent me from reaching my destination."

Dubois half arose on the bed and slapped his injured limb with an impatient gesture.

"Thees bust leg!" he exclaimed. "M'sieu, seence you tell me what you have, I would geeve wan thousan'—yes, by damn, two thousan'—dollar eef my leg, she were not broke. Then would Rouge Dubois see that you, M'sieu Yeatman, reech that Loon Lake in spite of feefty—seexty—seventy Beel Black. *Mais oui,* but we would geeve heem wan beeg race for eet, eh, what, m'sieu?"

"Look here," said Wayne, learning forward as he caught the joy of battle in the man's eyes, a wild joy that found reflection in his own, "what do you know about Bill Black's business at Loon Lake?"

Dubois pondered a moment. Finally:

"*Non, non,* m'sieu, I theenk I had better not say. You weel find eet out all for yourself when you get

there, an' me, wall, mabbe I don' know so much as I guess, though Beel Black ees 'fraid I know more than I guess. An' mabbe sometam I guess wrong, I might lead m'sieu astray."

"All right," said Wayne. "That may be best. Now about this other business; I'm sorry you can't take the job yourself; but can you direct me to a man who can?"

Again Rouge Dubois spent several thoughtful moments in studying Yeatman's face.

"You say there ees wan young woman?" he asked finally. "Mabbe the sweetheart of m'sieu?"

"Nothing like it," denied Wayne quickly. "She's not my sort. I've no use at all for women, especially her kind, but the kid is all alone and she's set on going up to the lake; and she's agreed to finance the trip, so, as I happen to be short of funds myself, I've agreed to look out for her."

Rouge Dubois burst into a laugh that made the bed on which he lay rock like a ship at sea.

"By damn! Me, I like beeg smart womens, womens what can fight." He paused, winked and lowered his voice. "My wife, she been dead two—t'ree—four year, but mabbe you see wan woman at Fort Carillon that Rouge Dubois like pretty wall; she's name Rosalie Thebault. Eef you ever get in trouble Rosalie, mabbe she help you out, eef you

tell her you know Rouge Dubois. Rosalie she can lick four men—when she good and mad."

Dubois paused a moment, knitting his brows, thinking. Finally:

"M'sieu, I also am sorry I cannot go weeth you: and that Beel Black, he's engage every guide on river, but there ees my daughter, Nanette; she know *la belle riviere* like wan *poisson*—like the feesh. But my sweet cabbage has a temper, has that Nanette. Eef, m'sieu, you can stan' the temper, Nanette ees look out for you and theese young woman in fine shape. She been up an' down ole lady Marquette weeth me two—t'ree—four hondred tam."

Wayne pondered the matter. He didn't fancy the idea of adding another woman to his party; he felt he had his hands more than full with this Miss Cecile Dennison. Still, for her, a woman guide might prove a distinct advantage. But there was that matter of the temper; it suggested trouble. He was accustomed to having his own way, absolutely, and he foresaw a clash of wills if Nanette Dubois were to be his guide. Temper in his animal pupils had always meant a battle to Wayne Yeatman, with himself the winner—or there was a dead lion, or tiger or leopard in the cage, whichever it chanced to be. He couldn't kill a woman, but she

certainly would have to knuckle under if their wills clashed, for his was iron.

While Wayne studied the question, Rouge Dubois began rapping on the wall beside his bed. The call was soon answered by the withered old crone who had admitted Yeatman. To her, Dubois gave an order in French and she vanished.

"My ole nabber, Betty Langeir," explained Dubois as she went. "She look after me seence my wife, she die. Betty theenk some day I marry her." He winked at Yeatman.

The old woman had been gone but a few moments when the door again opened to admit a young woman. Wayne arose abruptly from his chair. In his varied life he had met women of many sorts, but never one quite like she who entered now.

She might have been twenty, or she might have been less, for though her wise eyes were the eyes of a woman, her skin, sun colored to a softly warm red-brown, was flawless, and her brightly vermillion, bee-stung lips had the pouting freshness of an adolescent child. Her well formed body was muscular, with swinging hips and full breasts; but it was her manner and carriage as she walked that most impressed Yeatman.

No dignity was here; hers was the unconscious, innate grace, the perfect muscular coördination of a

healthy young animal. As she moved easily across the room and took a seat on the bed beside Rouge Dubois, Wayne was instantly reminded of that most graceful of beasts, a young female leopard.

"My daughter Nanette," said Dubois. "Nanette, theese man's name M'sieu Yeatman, Wayne Yeatman. He's good friend of Tom Porteous. He want for go down ole lady Marquette, but can't find guide because Beel Black engage them all. Seence your farder have wan bust leg that keep heem in bed for mabbe week or so, I theenk mabbe you like pilot heem and hees young woman frien' to Big Loon yourself, eh what, my sweet cabbage?"

Dubois' voice sounded caressing and conciliatory; it was plainly to be seen whose was the master will between these two, and the fact that it was the young woman Nanette somehow aggravated Yeatman beyond measure.

"The big lumper," he thought. "Doesn't he know that a girl like her ought to be handled as you would a nettle. Grip down quick and hard on a nettle and you are unharmed; handle it gingerly and you'll be stung at a dozen points."

Nanette turned toward Wayne; their eyes met. Her own were twin mates for his; as did his, they gleamed now like wet rubies.

Saying nothing, she continued to study him. He

would have given much to know what was in her mind, yet her inscrutable mask, of which only the smoldering eyes seemed animate, told him nothing. She was looking at the scar on his cheek, at his scarred hands. He had strangled the leopard that made that scar on his cheek.

Finally she nodded with evident approval as she said: "And m'sieu is willing to pay how much for a guide?" Her voice was a remarkably musical, soft contralto.

Rouge Dubois spoke quickly. "You had better allow your farder, ma'amselle, and M'sieu Yeatman to arrange that."

She made no comment, merely shifted those burning eyes of hers to her parent's face and studied that a moment, then looked again at Yeatman as she asked:

"And has m'sieu an outfit?"

"Nothing but clothing," he answered. "We shall be obliged to depend on you for canoes, camp truck and food for three."

"Dammit," he thought. "I hadn't decided to hire her; what am I talking like this for? These two, between them, seem to be taking the whole thing out of my hands."

"And when does m'sieu wish to start?" she asked.

"As soon as possible."

"Very well," she answered, arising. "I will be your guide. You can arrange the details with my father; he knows, or at least he thinks he knows, all about those things." This last a little scornfully, and the door had closed behind her.

Wayne Yeatman watched her go with puzzled eyes.

"A woman of few words; I'll say that for her."

He turned to Rouge Dubois and they arranged the details of the journey down the river. These matters settled, Wayne took his departure. It was now within half an hour of midnight, and they had planned to start at seven the following morning.

As Wayne stepped from the doorway of the Dubois home, he happened to glance casually opposite toward a grove of young trees that grew there, and halted abruptly. What he took, at first glance, to be the glowing end of a cigar and the dim shadow of someone standing there, had caught his eye. A second look and he decided that he must have been mistaken, for there was neither cigar light nor shadow visible now.

He started walking briskly toward the hotel, only to again pause after a few steps. Traveling down wind, he had caught the unmistakable perfume of most excellent tobacco.

Associating so much as he had with animals,

Wayne had, quite unconsciously, picked up some of their traits; one was an abnormally acute and unfailing sensitivity to different odors.

"No mistaking the brand of that cigar," he thought. "It's one of Bill Black's; same kind he started smoking when he came out of the Hotel Marquette restaurant after buying that option from the kid. He can't have gone down the river. The blamed rat has been watching me. I might as well go back and have it out with him."

Turning, Wayne hurried toward the spruce grove, sniffing the wind as he went, getting madder every minute.

But, on arriving there, he could find no one. Still boiling mad, he again retraced his steps toward the hotel, had arrived within a block of there, when, passing a shadowed doorway, he heard someone speak.

"Throw up your hands!"

Wayne threw them up.

A man with a handkerchief shrouded lower face stepped from the doorway. A revolver pressed against Wayne's stomach, he proceeded to go through his pockets. The reward was not great; only some silver and Miss Dennison's automatic. These he cast disgustedly aside as he growled:

"Tin-can sport, ain't you? Must be more on you than that. Let's see if you wear a money belt."

Gingerly, watching for the slightest sign of action, ready to shoot at the first move, the man pushed one hand inside Wayne's coat. His fingers caught the feel of the money belt. The eyes above his handkerchief glittered.

"Fork over that belt damned quick or I'll be takin' it from a corpse," he snapped.

Wayne pushed one hand inside his coat, made a feint of getting his sleeve caught and in less than a breath had the garment off and wrapped about the head and arms of his antagonist. It was an old trick, one he had worked hundreds of times with infuriated animals.

Two seconds later both of them were rolling on the ground, battling desperately for mastery. The man had managed to free his arms.

Not only was Wayne's deed to the Chovard tract in his money belt; but there also was Miss Dennison's money; he wasn't going to part with either without making a fight.

After a moment, he found himself on top, the man safely pinioned, and was reaching out to secure the automatic lying nearby when he heard sudden footsteps behind him and felt the impact of a tremendous blow on the back of his head. It set

a million stars flashing before his eyes, and it took all the fight out of him, but it did not render him wholly unconscious.

With a groan of pain he sank to the earth, knew that someone was tearing the money belt from beneath his clothing, gripped up one arm in a final desperate effort to recover it, found a piece of cloth in his grasp, dragged at it, and exposed the face of the man who had been taking breakfast that morning with Bill Black.

CHAPTER IX

THE TABLES TURN

A SECOND later there was only the sound of receding footsteps and Wayne was alone with a splitting headache and an acute sense of disgust that he had not had wits enough to leave his deed and that roll of bills belonging to Cecile Dennison in the Hotel Marquette safe when he went out in quest of Rouge Dubois.

And now he was confronted with the necessity of telling Cecile that he had been robbed, that, unless she could raise more money, or he could find a way of earning some, the journey to Big Loon Lake must be abandoned. Would she believe him? Would she not think his story but a lie to cover his own thievery?

A few deep breaths of the cool night air and Wayne's head had ceased spinning, his thoughts had become clearer. Arising, a little unsteadily, he pulled out his watch and looked at it.

"Six hours yet before we are due to start down the river; there must be something I can do."

He had already made a deposit with Rouge Dubois to cover the expenses of the trip, and had agreed to make a further payment in the morning when they started.

"Suppose I might go back to Dubois, tell him the circumstances of this hold-up and see if I can't stall him off on that payment I was to make in the morning," he thought.

Picking up the automatic and the silver which, in their haste to depart, the two holdup men had neglected to take, Wayne started toward the cabin of Rouge Dubois.

At first he traveled rather shakily, for the blow on his skull had been a mighty one; the effect clung. Yet Wayne was in ruggedly perfect health, inured to all sorts of hardships, and his splendidly working heart and nervous system soon began to send fresh energy into his limbs. Feeling stronger, he walked more rapidly.

As he arrived within sight of the Dubois home, the front door opened and someone came out. Wayne halted abruptly, drew back into a shadow and dropped to the ground.

Whoever it was stood at the door talking. As Wayne watched, he saw a match struck. In the glare he caught a fleeting glimpse of Bill Black

lighting a cigar and, standing in front of him, Nanette Dubois.

Immediately suspecting treachery on the part of the daughter of Rouge Dubois, else why should she be talking with Bill Black, Wayne began to rage. He had all but decided to confront them when Black turned away, said "Good night," and the door closed quietly.

Black crossed the road and stood for a moment in the shadow of the trees, evidently watching the house he had just quitted. Finally he started on, coming directly toward Wayne, but on the opposite side of the road. Between puffs of his cigar, he whistled softly to himself. Quite evidently the man was well satisfied with whatever undertaking he had been recently engaged in and the fact further increased Wayne Yeatman's anger.

The moment Black had passed so far that Wayne could barely distinguish his moving form, he arose and followed.

Black was traveling toward the river front. He had come to within a few steps of the water's edge when he halted, sat down on a stump and lit a fresh cigar.

"Waiting for somebody."

The thought had scarcely passed through Wayne's mind when Black was joined by two other men.

Wayne could see the three clearly, but he was unable to catch their conversation. He thought he recognized the last two arrivals as his former assailants, but he could not be sure. Finally the three parted, one of the men handing something to Black and then the two getting into a canoe and paddling across the river. Black watched them a while and then came toward where Wayne stood in the shadow of a low building used for the storage of goods awaiting shipment up or down stream.

Wayne gripped his automatic. "Mister Bill Black, here's where I turn the tables on you," he decided quickly.

Stepping from the shadow, the automatic leveled, he confronted Black. The man did not even start with surprise, he merely halted and eyed Wayne sharply as he said:

"Hello, Yeatman; what's this mean?"

"He's got nerves of steel; I'll say that for him," thought Wayne. Aloud he snapped:

"Put your hands up, that's what it means—both of them; I'm in no temper for trifling."

Both of Black's arms shot into the air. A sneer wreathed his hard mouth as he said:

"Rotten business, Yeatman. You'll do three or four years for this. What do you want, anyway?"

"Only my own property returned," answered

Wayne. "Half an hour ago you had one of your men frisk me for my money belt; now my turn has come."

"So that's your game?" said Black in a tone of distinct relief that puzzled Wayne. "Well, there's small use in my denying it, since your money belt happens to be in my inside coat pocket. I ought to have known enough to empty it and throw the thing away as soon as they handed it over, but I wanted to look through it at my leisure, in case there might be any papers there."

Wayne experienced a feeling of keen satisfaction that Black had not examined the belt and found his deed to the Chovard tract. Himself, he had had lingering doubts of that document ever since Cecile Dennison's declaration that she also held claim to the same land.

After making sure that Black was not armed, Wayne secured the money belt, and ascertained that its contents were intact.

"That's all I want of you, Black; now you may go," he said, thrusting the belt into his own pocket. "You can drop your hands."

Black dropped his hands, but did not turn to go away.

"Look here, Yeatman," he said, after studying Wayne's features for a second or two. "What's

the use in your acting at cross purposes with me? That sort of thing is expensive, and, besides, it doesn't get you anywhere. You want to go down the river, but I've sent all the river guides down stream with my men. I happen to know that you tried to get Rouge Dubois tonight but couldn't because he's not in town; in fact, nobody knows whether the man is living or dead; for my part I believe he's dead."

Again Wayne sensed a feeling of relief. At least, if Black were speaking the truth, Nanette Dubois and her parent had played no treachery. She had kept the fact from Black that her father was at home, and she had failed to disclose the information that she herself was to guide Wayne down the river. Wayne's confidence in Nanette rose several degrees; she was not only a woman of few words but she could keep things to herself, a rare virtue.

Black was still talking. "Why not come in with us? I'll guarantee you won't lose; it's only men who fight the Black-Downey interests that lose. We look out for our friends and a man of your caliber could prove himself mighty useful in our plans."

Wayne had a notion to try and draw the man out. He had already pocketed his automatic. Since Black was not armed, he felt able to cope with him unaided by any firearm, and to still keep him covered

seemed to Yeatman cowardly, like the cheap tactics of a common footpad, and he was not that.

"Well, what you got?" he asked in a more conciliatory tone. "If you want me to sit in on your game, you'll have to lay your cards flat on the table so I can see them—all. I don't play otherwise."

"You can't expect me to do quite that at this stage of the proceedings," Black temporized. "But this I will tell you: everybody knows, of course, that there's copper up in the Big Loon Lake country; I have an idea there's more than anybody else thinks. But even that wouldn't amount to much without some practical way of getting the metal out to market, which, at present, there isn't."

Wayne never shifted his eyes for the fraction of a second from Black's face. So far the man had appeared to speak frankly; Wayne was waiting for the lie; he felt sure it would come.

"Now I think I've doped out a plan for getting the metal out to the market cheaply and speedily—if it's there," went on Black, "and if I can secure control of enough land to make it worth our while. You have turned down my money offer. I'll better it, take you in with us. I'll give you twenty-five thousand cash, pay you a yearly salary of five thousand for four years, and let you cut in for a ten per cent share on any profits we make from your sec-

tion, provided of course that your claim to the Chovard tract proves clear."

"That all?" asked Wayne.

He had found the lie. Black's shifty eyes had told him. And now, in the back recesses of Wayne Yeatman's brain was an idea, as yet somewhat dim and indefinite, of the big affair the Black-Downey interests were trying to pull off, and it wasn't at all what it looked to be on the face of things.

"That's all," answered Black. "I'll put everything down in a contract, and as a business man, let me assure you that you'll live many years before you'll find anybody willing to make as generous an offer. Come now, you and I can work together, Yeatman; let's swing into it."

Wayne's jaw set. "Black," he said, "you've tried twice to double cross me. Once would have been aplenty; I never again trust a man that attempts to do me; they never reform, and my particular opinion of you isn't fit for type or tongue. Goodnight."

He had turned to go away when, with a snarl of defeated purpose, Black leaped toward him.

"You fool," he cried. "I'll——"

Black's sentence was never finished. Every splendid muscle in Wayne Yeatman's body had been prepared for just such an outcome as this; twenty years

with animal treachery had taught him that a half whipped beast can never be trusted.

His right fist crashed on the point of Black's jaw like the mighty blow of a twenty pound sledge hammer. The man's knees caved, his hips caved, his head and arms drooped and he crumpled to the earth. Wayne leaned over him. Then:

"Here's trouble; if the man isn't dead he's blamed near it. It would have been bad enough had he got me for holdup; now it will be a hundred times worse if he dies."

Yeatman canvassed the possibilities. Left here, Black's chances were slim and Wayne had no desire to stand trial for manslaughter. He remembered having passed a doctor's sign a short distance from the Hotel Marquette. Lifting Black in his arms, he started off with him.

It required some time and effort to rouse the physician; but when it was finally accomplished, he proved to be an individual of common sense and with considerable experience in mending the injuries of river men prone to frequent drunken brawls. Wayne gave him Black's name and a fictitious one as his own, told the doctor that Black had been knocked out in a free fight in a "blind tiger" and left, promising to call on the following day and ascertain how the patient was getting on.

Once outside, he hurried toward the Hotel Marquette and dispatched a call to Cecile Dennison's room, saying that he must talk with her at once regarding a very important matter.

It was all of twenty minutes before she sent down word that she would see him, and Wayne's patience had become well nigh exhausted.

"Had to powder that blamed nose of hers about a half dozen times, I suppose," he thought as he took the stairs three steps at a time.

She met him in the hallway just outside her room, dressed in a becoming negligee. She had not only powdered her nose but she had taken time to carefully arrange that splendid flame-of-gold hair. She did not believe one ought to meet anyone, least of all a man, unless one looked one's best. Little did she realize what was in store for her during the coming days!

"What's happened?" she gasped as she saw him. "Your face is as pale as paper."

"Hell, that's what's happened," he barked, and pushed open the door to her room. "Come in and I'll tell you about it."

She drew back with an air of ruffled dignity.

"I can't see you in there; you'll have to tell me out here."

He whirled on her with beetling brows. "Don't

be a silly fool; I've traveled most of my life in sleeping cars, and bedrooms aren't any treat to me. I don't want every lodger in the place listening to what I say. We'll leave the door open."

She stepped inside, folding the negligeé closer about her slender form, watching his every movement with great staring eyes, like a frightened deer.

"Cut out the baby-doll business and act like a woman," he ordered impatiently. "I'm not going to beat you—yet."

"Oh, I'm not afraid—if you're sober," she said.

"I'm sober, all right," he answered. "But I'm in a box, and we've got to get out of this town as quick as God and our own legs will let us; or at least, I have; you can come or not as you please."

In a few breathless, blurting sentences, he told her of having engaged Rouge Dubois' daughter to take them down the river, of the holdup, of his regaining the precious money belt and of having knocked Black out.

"Now I've got to vanish or Black, if he pulls through, may have me jailed," he concluded. "If you still hanker to visit the Big Loon Lake country, and don't mind traveling with a prospective jail bird, we can be out of here inside of an hour. Once on the river, there's small chance of Black's starting

the law after me; he's in too much shady business in that country himself."

As he finished, she was shivering, her teeth chattering like teacups in a tempest.

"What's the matter, are you cold?" he snapped as she made no comment on the situation, only shivered and stared at him.

"Blamed kid!" he thought. "Why haven't I got horse sense enough to tell her to go to hell and put all my energy into looking after my own muttons?"

"No, I'm not cold," she finally managed to stammer. "But I'm rather frightened; suppose Black dies?"

He hesitated, evaded her eyes. Then:

"Well, it's murder. But I told you in the beginning that this he-man's country was no place for a woman. Sudden death is as common up here as crackers and cheese. If you don't want to come, now's your opportunity to back out, for, take my word for it, this is only a mild sample of what you are likely to meet before you travel all the way through this place called Hell's Doorway."

Calmer now, she studied him a moment with half closed eyes and tightening lips. Then:

"You think I'm a quitter, don't you? Well, I'm not. You can't lead where I won't follow. I'll be ready to go down the river when you are."

"All right," he said, aware of a sudden feeling of admiration for her courage—if it was real. "I'll arrange with Nanette Dubois and come back here for you as soon as I can."

About to close the door behind him, he turned and added with a frown:

"But remember this, kid: you're going of your own free will and choice; if you happen to get hurt later, don't whine, and don't blame me."

"You haven't heard me whine yet," was her only answer.

CHAPTER X

THE RIVER

LEAVING the Hotel Marquette, Wayne Yeatman hurried toward the home of Rouge Dubois. Would Nanette be willing to start down the river at once, and could she get ready, were the questions that troubled him now.

Arriving at the Dubois home, Wayne hammered on the door for fifteen minutes without being able to arouse anyone. There were no lights and the place seemed to be deserted.

He went to the rear, found another door and began to hammer on that. There was no response.

"Either they sleep mighty sound or everybody has quit the place," he concluded.

He mentally reviewed the layout of the inside of the building, trying to form a picture that would indicate where the room was located in which he had interviewed Dubois, thinking it might be possible that the man was there alone and thus unable, with his injured limb, to come to the door. Wayne knew he had walked along a hall, turned a

corner and arrived at the room where Dubois lay on a bed; back of the bed had been a window.

This room, he decided, was on the south side of the building. He went around there and found three curtained windows, waist high above the ground. He rapped on two of them in succession and spoke Dubois' name, but failed to produce a response. The third venture proved more fruitful. He was sure he heard someone stir inside, the creaking of a bed.

"It's Yeatman," he called.

The window curtain was raised an inch or two and a pair of eyes peered out. Then the window was lifted and a voice spoke, impatiently.

"Well, m'sieu, what do you want?"

It was Nanette. Covered with confusion, Wayne could only stammer.

"I beg your pardon; I thought I was rapping on the window of your father's room. I wished to speak with him."

"My father has been carried away," she answered. "There was too much interest in the house; we thought it best that he should rest—elsewhere, I am alone."

Queer, thought Wayne, that they should cart off a man with a broken leg in the middle of the night. Why was Rouge Dubois so reluctant to have people

know that he was at home? Here was a tantalizing mystery to which Wayne could find no clew.

"All right," he said. "You'll do. Can you get ready to start down the river at once?"

"At once, m'sieu?" she repeated. "The plan was for seven o'clock."

"I know, I know," he answered impatiently. "But events have occurred that make it necessary to start immediately. I've got into a little trouble."

"Trouble?" she questioned, rather doubtfully.

"Why not tell her," he thought. "She'll discover it later anyway."

He explained the matter of the holdup and his fight with Black. He could see little of Nanette save her eyes, and once, while he talked, he heard her draw a quick, gasping breath, but, as he finished, she threw the window up and leaned forward, her bosom and arms bare.

"M'sieu, come closer," she said, and laid one hand on his shoulder, her dark eyes glowing as they stared into his, and she said caressingly:

"You only knocked Bill Black senseless; why, m'sieu, did you not kill him? Had you killed him I would go with you, not only to Big Loon Lake, but to the ends of the earth. While he lives I——" she caught herself and said no more.

Wayne was both startled and taken aback. "What

now have I stumbled on?" he thought. "Evidently this Nanette Dubois has even less love for Black than has her parent."

Aloud he said: "Never mind the ends of the earth; how soon can you get ready to start with me down the river?"

"In thirty minutes, m'sieu, I shall be ready," she answered briskly. "Do you know where the Hudson's Bay storage house is?"

He nodded.

"There is a small red painted building a little way this side of it," she went on, "which my father owns. The canoes and camp goods are there. Bring also your things there and we shall start."

The window was lowered and Wayne left to return to the Hotel Marquette. He found Cecile Dennison dressed in her outing clothes, ready and waiting for him in the hotel office. It required but a few moments to secure his own things and then they hurried toward the water front.

Nanette was there before them. Two canoes were in the river, a large one and a small one. Into the smaller canoe she was busy tossing bags of food and duffle. She arose from leaning over adjusting several packages to suit her as they approached.

She was hatless, her abundant dark hair loosely bound about her head in flat braids with a puff

over each ear, for the most recently then prevailing woman's style of hairdressing had penetrated even thus far into the north. Her dress was a short skirt with a blouse of dark brown Shackelton cloth and she wore high tan Hudson's Bay pacs reaching to her knees. The blouse, open at her throat, disclosed a columnar neck of splendid proportions and her perfect skin glowed warmly with the vigor of her recent exertions. She was superbly muscled, a beautiful creature, an ideal daughter of the open spaces. Dressed in an evening gown she would have appeared wholly out of her element, a peasant; dressed as she was now, with the softly shining river at her back, she was ravishing, a woman of undubitably flashing physical charm, a charm that Cecile Dennison sensed the moment their eyes met. This woman, or girl, as she was aware at once, was the direct antithesis of herself, and, herself, she could not repress a softly uttered sigh of admiration—and envy—as Wayne made them known to one another.

The contrast, as they stood for a moment exchanging commonplaces, was arresting; it was like placing beside each other a transparently white and delicate hothouse tea rose and a wildly luxuriant and gorgeous field-poppy. And each envied the other her appearance. Nanette would have given

worlds could she have looked like this beautifully pale city girl; while Cecile Dennison's thought was:

"What a glorious creature! Diana? No, a wood nymph. What exquisite limbs and skin!"

Impatient to get agoing down the river, Wayne broke into their talk. "What can I do to help, Nanette? Waiting here is wasting time."

Nanette turned and met his glance calmly. Nothing seemed to excite her; her features, as always, were an impassive mask, only the eyes animate; she seemed, for the first moment, to realize his presence.

"Place your luggage there, m'sieu, and we shall start," she said, indicating a vacant spot in the rear canoe that was fastened to the larger by a towing line. "I told you I would be ready in thirty minutes; it is not that yet."

"First woman I ever knew that did beat her own estimate," muttered Wayne beneath his breath as he stowed the suit-cases in the rear canoe and watched Nanette skillfully rope them so that there would be no danger of their being lost, even should the craft, which was built with air pockets on each side, capsize.

A few moments later and they were out in the middle of the silent, faintly rippled stream. Nanette sat in the stern of the first canoe, wielding her paddle with an easy stroke that seemed to shoot them ahead

with scarcely an effort. Wayne sat in the bow; Cecile Dennison in the middle. Behind them the dawn was just beginning to break, faint streaks of wispy gray light far down on the horizon.

Cecile Dennison was all eyes. To her this was a new world they were entering, a world of untold wonders, of what surprises she could scarce imagine. The early morning air was crisply cool, stimulating; she drank in great gusts of it and was immensely glad that she was alive; the blood racing through her veins made her body glow and for almost the first time in her sheltered life she was overcome by a sense of well-being so exquisite, so infinitely complete that it gave her the feeling of being born anew.

So far north at this season there was no real darkness at any time during the night, and it was already so light, that peculiar clear light of the country, that objects could be distinguished long distances away. There were no sounds save the soft swish-swish of Nanette's paddle and the steady lap and brush of the water cut by the bow of each canoe. All about were the damp, sweetly penetrating odors of the morning, of pines beginning to shed their needles, of wakening cedar and spruce, box and wintergreen; no Paris *perfumaire* has yet produced anything one-half so delightfully refreshing.

Wayne, in the bow, occasionally took several strokes with a paddle he had found there; he had, however, done this but a few times when Nanette called to him:

"*Non, non,* m'sieu, it is not necessary. That paddle is only to keep the canoe straight when we arrive at an angry spot in old lady Marquette. I will teach you later."

Going down with the current as they were, even Nanette's paddling was, at present, not really needed; later, they would come to places in the stream where every last ounce of muscular power that was packed in her splendid body would have to be called into play.

Finally they halted and Nanette cooked breakfast with rare deftness, Cecile Dennison watching her with jealous eyes. Bacon and scrambled eggs, coffee and crusty bread; had any meal on earth ever tasted sweeter? she thought. Even Wayne, accustomed as he was to a lifetime of outdoor eating in all sorts of weather, found a world of difference between the skillful and savory cookery of Nanette Dubois and the hastily prepared meals served by men cooks with tent shows.

They started on again and traveled until dusk, knowing no sign of weariness, no lack of zest for the glorious river panorama that hourly unfolded

before them, always something new, some fresh vista opening to eyes that drank it in with exquisite pleasure. Now the river banks were high and steep, tier on tier of rain gullied rock, silver gray, copper, or perhaps burnt umber, topped with towering trees of darkly matted green. Now the banks were low and stretched away to infinite distances of lighter green that tumbled and rollicked in easy rises and deep tundras like a restless sea that had suddenly paused to gaze aloft and wonder at the glory of God's sky of deepest, rarest blue; Canada's blue, a color that makes even Switzerland's blue seem pale and washed.

No one talked; even Nanette, to whom all this was an old, old story, as old as herself, found such joy in the looking that mere words would have seemed to mar a perfect dream.

There were no mosquitoes, no flies in mid-stream, nothing to disturb them save possible memory of what had passed, or anxiety for the future.

Came dusk and they camped. Wayne tried to assist Nanette in erecting the two tents but she worked so deftly, and he so clumsily, that he soon began to feel as if, compared with her, his hands were all thumbs. As he sat down on a stump with a discouraged air, Nanette gazed at him a little scornfully.

"M'sieu," she said without pause in her labors, "this is my work; it is what you are paying me for. You do not do it well; you had better desist."

"But I feel like a fool, watching you labor while I sit and twiddle my fingers."

"Then, m'sieu, if you must do something, find the ax and cut up some of those down trees," she said more kindly. "We shall need much wood before morning, for I can see that it is going to be cold."

Wayne found the ax and started off, thinking: "There'll be war yet between this Nanette Dubois and me. I never can stand her bossing."

Strangely enough, the instant Wayne was out of sight, Nanette turned to Cecile and said:

"Mam'selle, would you like to help?"

Cecile, who had been sitting beside the fire, was on her feet in an instant, her great eyes shining.

"If you would only permit me? But I fear I shall be even more clumsy than Mr. Yeatman. I know absolutely nothing of camp labor; but I do so wish to learn."

Nanette's nose flattened scornfully.

"He is not particularly clumsy, this M'sieu Yeatman; but it is well to show a man his place at the outset. He is to take his orders from me."

Cecile shook her head doubtfully. "I fear you have a difficult task before you; he is not one who takes orders well."

"I shall show him, then!" answered Nanette confidently. "Though men never acknowledge it, they really like to have a woman order them about. It makes them feel less responsible. All men are like that."

"Are they?" said Cecile thoughtfully. "Perhaps, but this one has not impressed me as being that sort."

"This one!" repeated Nanette, her eyes widening. "Is the gentleman, then, not mam'selle's sweetheart?"

"Sweetheart!" exclaimed Cecile laughing. "I think not. I only met him yesterday. I was alone, coming into a strange country of which, as I realize now, I knew absolutely nothing, and he offered to look after me. Needing some one to do just that, I accepted. It is purely a business arrangement, nothing more."

"Oh, mam'selle, I did not understand," said Nanette. "He is a handsome devil, this M'sieu Yeatman; that scar on his cheek intrigues me; it makes him look distinguished, interesting, and his queerly scarred hands. I wonder how they became so?"

"I haven't the remotest idea," answered Cecile indifferently.

"Then mam'selle does not find him interesting?" asked Nanette curiously, as they busied themselves about the fire preparing supper.

"Useful, but not particularly interesting," answered Cecile with an enigmatic smile.

CHAPTER XI

THE RAPIDS

Toward morning, Wayne Yeatman awoke to find that rain was descending on his tent roof in torrents, the wind beginning to blow hard. He got out from under a blanket—he had gone to sleep in his clothing—and went to the door of the tent.

In anticipation of just such a possible outcome as this heavy rain, Nanette had built the night fire beneath the fly of her own and Miss Dennison's tent, a tanalite Baker. Here, backed by a huge pile of logs to leeward, it was still burning brightly, sending grateful warmth, and some smoke, inside the shelter. Wayne, in his one-man hikelite tent, which would have been used by Nanette had not Cecile Dennison been there, had scorned a fire.

As he lifted the flap of his own shelter and looked out toward the fire in front of the other tent, he thought there was no one there. A second glance showed him a huddled figure in a black rubber poncho, sitting back to the driving rain, poking sticks into the blaze. It was Nanette.

He went toward her and spoke low, so as not to arouse Cecile Dennison, should she be asleep.

"I suppose, Nanette, this knocks us out of traveling? I'm sorry; I counted on covering a good stretch today."

Nanette looked up with a start. The firelight made her eyes glow in the darkness like burning coals.

"And why, m'sieu, should this rain stop us?" she asked.

"Won't this wind make the river pretty rough?"

The wind was increasing; he could hear dead trees crashing in the forest about them and toward the river the firelight was reflected from a thousand rain spattered white-caps. To his unpracticed eye, it did not look as if a light canoe could possibly live in that wild surge of water that raced past them.

"M'sieu speaks truly about the wind making the river rough; but were I alone and in a hurry, I should chance it, for I have ridden *la belle riviere* when she was much angrier than today. In this case, it is, of course, for m'sieu to decide."

"I'd like nothing better myself," he answered, glancing toward the stream. "But I don't even know whether the kid can swim or not, and I suppose, since she is financing this trip, she must be considered first."

"M'sieu is very thoughtful," was Nanette's only reply, a remark that made Wayne switch his glance quickly back to her.

"Does this damned girl imagine I don't dare try the river?" was the first rushing thought for which he looked for an answer in the face of Nanette Dubois. But that face was as impassive as always. With him, her features could be Carnelian marble, but they had been animate enough when she talked with Cecile Dennison.

"Oh, well," he offered, "perhaps it will be calmer by the time we are ready to start."

"Perhaps," she answered. "The wind is driving north; it will just about catch M'sieu Bill Black's party at the first rapids."

Wayne dropped to a seat beside her; Nanette's manner of speaking had given him an idea.

"Look here, Nanette," he said. "It strikes me you're in about as much of a hurry to get up into the Big Loon Lake country as I am, what?"

Nanette waited a moment before answering, then:

"No, m'sieu, had I followed my own inclinations, I should, after I knew what you had done to Bill Black, have remained at Arleen. But I had given m'sieu my word to take him to Big Loon Lake."

"But what the devil has the fact of my having put Bill Black down for the count got to do with

your wanting to remain at Arleen? I thought from the way you spoke when I told you about it that you hadn't much love for that man."

Nanette whirled toward him, her eyes blazing.

"Love!" she gasped. "This is the sort of love I have for that M'sieu Bill Black: he may die; when he does, I should like to be beside him, I should like to watch him fighting for his last breath. I should like him to know I was there; it would not make his last moments any the happier, I assure you of that."

As Nanette spoke, she tore violently with one hand at the neck of her blouse, as if she herself were living through Black's last moments. Wayne watched her, his own eyes shining. As she finished, he laid one hand on her arm as he said:

"You're a devil. I've seen your like many a time among my animal pets."

At his touch, Nanette's violent mood appeared to soften instantly. She glanced down at his scarred hand, then at the record of that deep wound on his face.

"How, m'sieu, did you come by that scar?" she asked. "It must have been a terrible injury. Half an inch higher and you would have lost one of your eyes."

"That's the result of a little scrap with a leopard,"

he answered. "A snow leopard—they're black, not white; I don't know why they call them snow—one of the most beautiful, most graceful animals that lives. I was trying to train eight of them to perform in a steel barred cage. She was Vixen, the cleverest, the most beautiful of them all, yet the most treacherous; a very devil, and she couldn't stand the whip. I gave her too much of it one day, and that's what she gave me."

"M'sieu then is an animal trainer?" she asked.

"Was," he answered. "I don't expect to do much more of it."

"And why?"

His eyes shifted from her face and stared a moment into the fire before he answered. Finally:

"Well, I think I know when to quit. They get you finally, are sure to. It's like aviation; if a man flies long enough he's certain to fall. I quit broke, but I didn't, like most trainers, quit inside the cage."

Nanette spoke quickly. "But isn't that a glorious way to go? Myself, I hope some day to die in the arms of *la belle riviere,* old lady Marquette, as my father calls her. I love the river; the day she kills me I think I shall love her most."

"Glorious enough way to go—if that's the sort of glory you like," answered Wayne. "But it would

seem merely foolish to me; wasting my life to gratify an animal's desire for revenge."

"That is your philosophy, m'sieu," said Nanette, rising from her seat beside the fire as she saw Cecile Dennison stirring inside the open tent. "It is not mine. Were I an animal trainer, I should wish to die 'in the cage' as you put it."

Nanette handed him the poncho she had been wearing. "Put this on, m'sieu," she said. "I have another." She lowered the front of the Baker tent and vanished inside.

Wayne donned the poncho and went down to the river edge. The hurricane, as Nanette had prophesied, had seemed to blow itself off to the north; there were only occasional tempestuous gusts now, but the rain was still falling in torrents. So much pelting rain helped to quiet the river, but it looked as if it would still be rather uncomfortable traveling in an open canoe.

He had been watching the water but a few moments when he heard Cecile Dennison's voice calling behind him. He turned and saw her coming. Like himself, she was clothed in a long poncho, and she wore a sou'wester, rakishly tilted from her face. For the first time since they had met, Wayne was aware of a faint spot of color in her cheeks and a more natural carmine to her lips. He was struck

by the change it made in her appearance; how much less boyish and more womanly she looked.

She was laughing as she fought the wind and the cool rain beat in her face; running a few steps, halting and then coming on again, an entrancing figure in the gray morning light.

"Isn't this a gorgeous storm?" she called. "And the river, it's even more beautiful than under the sun; it's like something gone wild."

"Pretty wild," he said. "Don't suppose you'll dare risk going on today? I'm sorry, hoped we wouldn't lose any time."

"Risk it!" she repeated. "I wouldn't miss canoe riding through this rain for worlds. It will be glorious. I love a beating storm that tosses one about; it's fun, fighting back."

"Can you swim?" he asked rather anxiously.

It was queer, the protective feeling toward her that was beginning to possess him, since he had decided to look out for her as far as Big Loon Lake. Never before had he felt in this way toward anybody.

"I can swim," she answered with a confident toss of her head. "It's my one athletic accomplishment. My father taught me when I was quite young; threw me out into the water; I had to swim—or thought I had to, which was the same—and I did, without

previous training. That may seem a cruel way to be taught, but it was the right way with me, as my father knew."

Wayne nodded. "I understand—and it would be better if more children were taught things in that way, by being made to do them instead of bombarding their brains with theories. It's nature's way, the way all animals teach their young."

"You understand animals, don't you?" she said. "I woke up just as you were explaining to Nanette about your profession and that leopard, Vixen."

Wayne could hardly wait for her to finish.

"Understand animals!" he exploded derisively. "Not me, nor anybody else, no matter how long you live with them. They're like women; when you do think you understand them, that's the time to watch out. You're due for a surprise, perhaps a painful one. In my conceit I thought I was beginning to understand Vixen; you can see how far wrong I was; she got me the first time my guard was down."

"Did you succeed in breaking her spirit?"

"No," he answered unsuspectingly. "I was so mad when she turned on me that I choked her to death before they could drag me out of the cage."

Cecile studied his face thoughtfully a moment. Then, as she turned back toward the tent:

"You couldn't stand the whip any better than she, could you?"

He stared after her, hardly knowing whether to get mad or not. Finally:

"Isn't that the woman of it for you? What does she mean; doesn't she know that it had to be me or that leopard? I suppose she thinks that *I* ought to have knuckled under and let Vixen run the cage thereafter. Fat chance I'd had with that cat-devil after she'd once got a taste of my blood. You can't break a cat animal's spirit as you can an elephant's; but it wouldn't be any use to tell *her* that; she's a woman. Women are ruled by sympathy, not by common sense—my idea is some of 'em haven't *got* any common sense."

In an hour they had breakfasted, struck the tents and were again on their way. The water was rough, but Nanette was remarkably skillful in handling a canoe and got them out of every difficulty, though oftentimes it seemed to be only by a miracle.

Before starting, Nanette had given Wayne a few instructions in how to manage a bow paddle.

"At ten o'clock we shall work the Paradise Rapids —if they are not too bad today—five hours later, the second, Kicking Mule," she said. "And then, m'sieu, you must help. But please remember this:

do only what I tell you; nothing more, or you may throw us all out into the water."

Traveling with an animal show, Wayne, as do all followers of the big tops, had dreaded rainy days as he might the plague. Everything one touched was wet; the ground under foot churned to a sticky, clinging mud; it was either cold or it was uncomfortably muggy, and there was nothing to do but sit in a soggy, dripping tent and play poker, listen to Rabelaisian stories, or smoke. And there had always been more or less trouble with the animals in such weather; they were fretful, sulky, and difficult to manage.

But now, racing down the turbulent Marquette at express speed through a driving rain, was a joyous adventure that exhilarated him tremendously. The river banks that flew past them were a beating mist of gray-green, the rain fell against the back of his rubber poncho as if it were a storm of leaden shot, and his face was covered with the cold beads of it, yet, inside, he was dry and warm. The hardest task he had to perform was to remain perfectly quiet, which Nanette had told him he must do if she were to manage the canoe.

"M'sieu, one cannot guide a canoe with a shifting load, not in such water as this," she had said.

Herself, she moved only from the waist, swaying

lightly above her hips as she took powerful strokes with the paddle and watched the water with intent eyes.

Once Wayne turned and looked back toward Cecile Dennison. She caught his glance and made the motion with her lips of saying:

"Isn't it glorious?"

He could not hear, but he knew what she had said; answered, "Glad you like it," and turned back. He knew now, from the tense look on Nanette's face that they were approaching dangerous water.

Suddenly they entered a cleft gorge, turned a bend in the stream, and Wayne's heart went down into his boots.

"Great hokum!" he thought as he glanced ahead. "We never can make that. Nanette must be cuckoo; we ought to have portaged."

He did not dare turn; he didn't dare move; he could only stare ahead at a wild, boiling swirl of water that looked as if it could crumple a boat of steel. There were milky-green whirlpools everywhere that there were not ugly up-jutting rocks, some of them knife sharp. Nowhere between the high banks was there a bit of calm surface, no single spot that did not race tearingly about as if old lady Marquette had indeed gone daft with rage.

Abruptly, Nanette shot the canoe in toward the

bank and caught at a single overhanging tree with one arm.

"The girl has got sense," he thought. "She's going to portage."

But no; Nanette had no idea of portaging; it would have meant a four mile detour; with their loads, almost a full day's task. She was merely unfastening the towing line of the rear canoe, tying it to the tree. Alone, she could work her way along the river bank, come back and get it. To have towed its unwieldy bulk through would be a serious handicap to them. She was too river-wise to attempt it.

A moment later and they were again out in the middle of the stream, the canoe, released of the towed craft, was in the first rush of Paradise Rapids. No human power could turn them back now, and it was almost a half mile to even comparatively calm water.

The canoe dipped and bowed, acted as if it intended to turn somersaults, was beaten and banged at right and left; it seemed to miraculously avoid crashing on upjutting rocks by the mere breadth of a hair; the whirlpools caught it, tried to whirl it like a top in a wild, mad spin; but always Nanette was able to avoid the danger that meant almost certain death.

The skill of French-Canadian river men seems at times to be almost super-human, yet Nanette could have given most of them a sizable handicap and beat them easily. She had handled a paddle ever since her tiny fingers were long enough to grasp it. Like an expert billiardist, she knew precisely when and how to deliver the unerring stroke that would accomplish the end she desired, and, what is more, she had a heart of steel and was familiar with every ripple on old lady Marquette's bosom.

There had seemed to Wayne no possible way through that tremendous surge of boiling water, but somehow, somewhere, Nanette found one. They left the final whirlpool as if shot into the air from a mighty cannon, the bow of the canoe struck the surface with a thunderous slap and they were in smoother water.

As Nanette skillfully avoided a last rock, he glanced down at its menacing surface and saw something beneath that startled him; the pasty white face of a man whose clothing had caught on an upjutting point.

It was Giuseppi, the lad of the knife. He was dead, but his limbs, twisted this way and that by the racing river, made it seem as if he were still

struggling with grim desperation, fighting to free himself.

"Don't see how any of Black's heavily loaded rafts could navigate these rapids," he thought. "I'll bet there's more than Giuseppi made their final bow here."

He turned to assure himself that Cecile Dennison was all right, caught one glance from two staring eyes set in a milk-white face from which there trickled a stream of blood, and then saw her lurch forward in a faint.

CHAPTER XII

THE WHIP

"KNEW it!" muttered Wayne as Cecile crumpled up in the bottom of the canoe. "One little bump puts her out of business."

Somewhere as they were banged about in the rapids, she had received a glancing blow on her forehead, and it was from this the blood came, but he saw at once that it was only a superficial affair.

He shouted to Nanette.

"All right, m'sieu," she answered. "We will make the bank."

Wayne leaped out, pulled the canoe up on a little shelving, sandy beach scarcely three feet wide, lifted Cecile Dennison in his arms, laid her on the sand and began to wash the blood from her face and chafe her hands.

"The damned kid," he thought. "If she wilts like this at the first rapids, what will she do at the next?"

Cecile opened her eyes.

"I must have fainted," she said dazedly. "It was stupid of me, but I'd never been through anything

like that before." She sighed. "It was awful, wasn't it? And that dead man! I thought we should never get out."

"Awful!" he exploded indignantly. "Great hokum, girl, that was nothing! It was only the first; we've got a half dozen more to navigate before we reach Fort Carillon; all as bad, if not worse than that. How you expect you're ever going to get through if you faint at every little thing?"

Nanette pushed him aside. "That is no way to talk," she said. "Mam'selle has a privilege to faint if she wishes, I think. I fainted myself in the Kicking Mule rapids the first time I worked them with my father. Every one must have their baptism of blood."

Cecile looked her gratitude, but in her eyes was a doubt. She had just faced death, a grisly death that had held out actual clutching fingers, fingers that she could see and feel, and she didn't want to die.

Then, as she caught the half shadowed scorn in Wayne Yeatman's eyes, something overcame her, a feeling she had never experienced before; intense anger, resentment and the desire to strike, to beat this brute who was sneering at her, a woman, because she had not shown the fortitude in passing through their recent danger that he, a man, had.

She was ready to cry with vexation because she

couldn't strike him. Then her repressed anger bred a certain grim courage, a mad desire to show him that she was not the soft kid he thought her.

Nanette's voice broke in upon her train of thought.

"Now that mam'selle has recovered herself, I must return and bring through the loaded canoe; then we will go on again."

Cecile looked up with sudden determination. "You are going back to pilot the second canoe through the rapids?"

Nanette smiled. "Of course, mam'selle; you did not suppose I intended leaving it there?"

"Then I'm going with you, if I may?" answered Cecile, rising to her feet.

Nanette looked all the astonishment she felt. "But that, mam'selle, is foolish," she said. "You have passed through once; why tempt fate again?"

"Because I want to," was Cecile's only answer.

Nanette shrugged expressive shoulders. "Of course, if mam'selle wishes."

She started back along the narrow bank that, in long stretches, left only room for a single foothold beside the high shelving walls of gray rock to which she had to cling with all ten fingers or fall into the rapids.

Cecile turned toward Wayne and shot him a with-

ering glance. "Damn you!" she said, and followed Nanette.

Standing beside the river, he watched the two of them navigate Paradise Rapids the second time. At first, he saw the canoe only as a dot a half mile away, tossed here and there on the foaming water, every second in danger of annihilation. A score of times his heart choked his throat, for he was certain they were gone. It had been thrilling, his own thundering ride through the rapids; it was doubly so now to watch them, for their danger seemed more actual than had his own.

As they came nearer, he could pick out Cecile Dennison's slight figure seated in the bow, her tense fingers clutching the sides, her head held high, her jaws grimly set as they shot through the wild water and the driving rain.

Something of the tremendous battle she was waging penetrated to him; he found it impossible to withhold his admiration.

"She's scared blue," he thought. "Yet she won't give in to it. She's not fighting the river; she's fighting herself, the self that turns coward at the thought of death. The blamed kid's got the stuff in her; she's got the stuff!"

He saw her steel herself to glance a second time at the grotesquely twisting form of drowned

Giuseppi, and was afraid she would faint again as her eyes closed to blot out the grisly sight. Then, as her sagging shoulders straightened and her head went up, he knew she had won, had at last mastered her fear.

A few moments later the two canoes were again moving down a stream that, after the rapids, seemed comparatively quiet. After a time the rain ceased, but there was no sun. Just before they halted for lunch, they passed a second and then a third body, both Italians, tangled in the low growth of bush that lined the bank.

"M'sieu Black's rafts must have had bad luck at Paradise Rapids," said Nanette as she started a fire to cook coffee. "It is not strange; several of the guides he hired had not traversed old lady Marquette more than twice; and that in canoes. With a raft it is another story."

Wayne wondered if Nanette were saying this to reassure Cecile, whose face had gone white at sight of the bodies, or if she had spoken in good faith. Himself, he had supposed shooting the rapids in a raft would be the safest, if one could only manage to hang on.

The lunch nearly through, he knew that Nanette's surmise had been at least half correct. They were still eating when they heard some one crashing

through the bush at their back, and, a moment later, a half clothed Cree Indian with staring, frightened eyes burst out. He wore only trousers, mucklucks, and a slouch hat, and there was a wound in his head covered with dried blood.

As he saw them, he half halted, as if in doubt, then recognized Nanette and came toward the fire. Nanette arose and he began jabbering to her in a polyglot of Cree, English, and French, frequently pointing down the river with excited gestures.

Finally Nanette turned to Wayne, her face anxious.

"He says the Italians have mutinied and overcome the guides. Twelve of the Italians—he thinks it was twelve, but he can't count above six—were drowned working Paradise Rapids. When they came to the Kicking Mule Rapids, they refused to go through."

"Well, that's none of our hash, is it?" answered Wayne.

"But this Cree, Tompeter, says they are coming back this way and that they've killed two white men they met and who tried to help free the guides."

"Sounds fishy," said Wayne. "Those wops were not armed. I happen to know that Black had every man searched for firearms and knives the second time before they started. He knew their propensity

for it and was afraid they'd get fighting amongst themselves."

Tompeter, the Cree, broke in on Wayne's talk.

"No fight with guns," he said. "Him fight with clubs; worse; crack head. Me no like club fight; make sick."

Wayne glanced at the Indian scornfully.

"The poor fish," he thought. "Afraid of a tap from a wooden club."

Nanette broke in on his train of thought.

"Shall we go on, m'sieu?" she asked.

Wayne looked at Cecile who had been sitting by the fire listening.

"Well?"

She met his glance with a cold stare.

"Why do you ask me? As I told you before, I have placed myself wholly in your hands. If you think it advisable to go on, I shall be quite satisfied."

"But that's leaving the responsibility wholly on my shoulders," he protested vehemently, thinking: "Blame these women; they seem to get the best of me without an effort when it comes to argument."

"Quite so," she answered and that was all.

He fidgeted, but could find nothing further to add. Turning to Nanette he said:

"Ask the Indian if the Italians are returning by way of the river or by the pack trail."

The Cree said he did not know. They had started back poling the rafts against the current, but he judged they would soon find it such difficult work that they would abandon that method of transportation and take to the pack trail, if they could persuade their guides to show them the way.

"All right," said Wayne. "We'll keep to the river and go on. If we meet the Italians—but there's no use in crossing that bridge until we come to it."

They pushed off the two canoes, the Cree, Tompeter, watching them with doubtful eyes as if he thought them surely insane. As they turned a bend he disappeared in the bush.

The river had become calm, traveling a delight; the dense wood growth on each side waving rain dripping arms toward them as they sped on. The sun had come from behind the clouds and shone comfortably, now at one side, now at the other as the stream twisted and turned between low hills.

Once a huge brown bear—hootz—came down to the river edge to drink, and Nanette back-paddled quietly that they might secure a good view of him. Finally he heard them, raised himself on his haunches to see better, sniffed the air keenly and vanished with many pig-like grunts and cries of woof! woof!

At sight of him Wayne's nerves had begun to

tingle. It brought back all the old glamor of his tent show life. He had no desire to shoot the animal, but he would have liked to stop and engage in a friendly wrestle with the fellow. He felt certain that he could have handled him, big as he was, without suffering any harm himself.

Abruptly, they rounded a bend in the river, came to a narrower part between high banks and found it fairly choked with the rafts that had been built for Black's Italians. But there was not a human being in sight anywhere. The rafts were wedged so close together that there was no chance to paddle through the jam.

As Nanette stopped the canoe Wayne turned back toward her.

"What does this mean?"

"It looks as if M'sieu Black's Italians have taken to the pack trail. We will portage around this jam and go on."

They had beached the two canoes and finished unloading them when a man with white face and wildly staring eyes came stumbling down the bank. Nanette looked up and recognized him.

"Hello, Jacques Fordier!" she called. "You look scared; what's the matter?"

"By gar, matter enough!" he stammered. "You know them dam wop we go for guide? What you

theenk they do, Nanette? They try for string me up to tree by my wrist because I rafuse to show them pack trail. But I get away. Now they string up Etienne Paravent because he also rafuse, say he guide them to Big Loon Lake but nowhere else."

Nanette's eyes began to blaze.

"And you, Jacques Fordier, you ran off and deserted Etienne?" she asked.

"Ran off and lef' heem?" stuttered Jacques. "I should theenk I did. What you suppose? I fight feefty—one hondred men? Believe it to me, Nanette, I am French-Canadienne, and I lak good fight—but I am not damn fool."

"I don't care if there were two hundred," stormed Nanette. "I wouldn't desert a friend."

She turned to Wayne as she picked up her rifle from the canoe.

"M'sieu," she said, "you must wait here. I am going to help Etienne."

"By gar, eef you go, Nanette, I go too," said Jacques, stung to a recrudescence of courage by her attitude. "But I got no gun; I theenk them crazy wop she easy get best of us."

Cecile Dennison spoke quickly.

"I have an automatic, and Mr. Yeatman has another. We can all go."

Wayne looked at her. "Hadn't you better keep

out of this? You've no idea what you may be getting into."

"No, I hadn't, and I don't care what I may be getting into," she retorted spiritedly. "I'm going."

"All right," he said. "It's no skin off my nose."

Wayne handed his automatic to Jacques. "You take that," he said. "I've something that may be more useful with this gang of guineas than a firearm."

He began rummaging in his luggage and pulled out a long, pliable, braided black snake whip with a heavy, lead-loaded butt. It was the only thing he had carried away when he left the animal show. On scores of occasions the whip had saved his life and he felt attached to it, though, at the time, it had never occurred to him that it would be of any use save as perhaps an ornament for his den, should he ever possess a settled home of his own.

Jacques indicating the direction, they started up the bank. As they hurried along, Wayne inquired of the guide regarding what had started the trouble with the Italians.

"First rough water we come to, all them wop she go crazy," he answered. "Theenk she all gone drown. At Paradise Rapid, some of them wop, they grab paddle and poles and try for guide raft through himself.

"Sure, they got no chance; we lost 'bout ten. When we come to second rapid, Kicking Mule, them wop all say they got plenty, thank you, no more rapid for them. Jack Trumbell, hees Black boss, he say we go through. Then wop say no. They fight. She all off! Them wop he win and run things for suit herself. They start for pack trail, but when we rafuse to show them way they begin for string us up by wrist, one at time."

As Jacques finished his story, they heard a man's agonized scream, in the distance, and all broke into a run, soon coming within sight through the bush of a clearing.

Surrounding a tree were some fifty of the Italians. Suspended from one of the limbs by his wrists was Etienne Paravent, a handsome young French-Canadian with curling black hair and pain-tortured face.

More than a dozen of his companions were scattered amongst the Italians, but their arms had been pinioned and they could give him no help.

One glance and Wayne saw that bullets fired into that crowd would be as likely to kill some of the guides as any of the Italians. He turned to Nanette.

"You folks remain here a minute," he said, "and let me see if I can't handle that bunch. It's no

use to shoot; you'll be likely to wound or kill some of the guides."

The Italians, busy with their torturing of Etienne Paravent, had not yet seen the four people who had emerged from the bush.

Hatless, his every muscle tensed, Wayne strode toward the gathering. His blood raced; the joy of battle shone in his burning eyes. Literally thousands of times, and armed only with the whip he carried now, he had handled thirty tigers in a twenty-foot steel barred enclosure, and he felt as little fear of these fifty Italians as he had of the tigers. He was rather glad that he possessed no firearm, for he thought the Italians had none and it made the fight seem fairer.

He was within a hundred feet of them when they became aware of his presence. A dozen, armed with clubs, started toward him on the run.

Bracing his feet, he met them, caught the foremost man across the face with a lash of the whip that seared as though it had been white hot. With a howl of pain the man fell back, nursing his injured cheek. Six others, shielding their faces with their arms, stooped and attempted to rush in under his whip.

Useless effort. Wayne knew every tactic that could be evolved to beat a blacksnake and how to meet it. His whirling, stinging weapon, hitting in

every direction with lightning like rapidity, was more effective than a sword, for the fear of it soon taught every man to keep his distance as Wayne slowly worked his way toward the hanging Etienne, who had now fainted with the pain of his torture.

The Italians had become a sullen, roaring mob, first one, then another, beneath the taunts of his comrades, attempting to dart in on Wayne, only to be met with a dexterous cut of the whip.

Bringing his weapon down on every available point of exposed flesh that came within his reach, Wayne drove them in retreat until he stood beside the suspended guide. Then came a feat of skill that made even the Italians stare.

Not daring to stop and hunt through his pockets for his knife and wait to open it with his teeth, Wayne struck with a quick sawing stroke of the whip at the rope that suspended Etienne by his wrists. As the lash curled about it like a snake, it was as quickly snatched away, leaving the rope smoking.

Again he struck, and again, in swift succession. Now the rope burned. A moment later it parted and Etienne's limp form fell to the ground.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE RAFT

With the fall of the guide, Wayne had expected the Italians would rush for him in a body and had braced himself to meet them. Instead, his amazed ears were greeted with a ringing cheer.

His feat of burning the rope with a whip lash had fired their imaginative temperaments to white heat, had made him seem to them a veritable wonder man. Never had they witnessed anything like that; it was a miracle, nothing less. Before they had desired only to kill him; now they hailed him as a hero.

The fat padrone stepped out from the crowd and bowed with shrugged shoulders and outspread palms.

"Boss," he said, "you beat us the second time; we no want a any more troub' with you."

"Going to behave, eh?" scowled Wayne. "Well, start in by releasing all those guides you've got trussed up there."

A moment, the padrone looked doubtful; Wayne began to curl and uncurl his black snake meaningly and the padrone grinned.

"All right; you the boss," he said and shouted an order to his men in Italian. A moment more and the guides, including Black's man Trumbell, were released. Trumbell came toward Wayne with outthrust hand.

"By the eternal, I don't know who you are," he said cordially. "But you're pure white and you're certainly a wiz with a whip. These blasted Italians might have killed us all but for you."

Wayne ignored the hand. He had recognized Trumbell, having had the man pointed out to him on the morning when the Italians were preparing to leave Arleen.

"Work for Bill Black, don't you?" he asked.

Trumbell nodded.

"Well, Bill Black and I are enemies. And any friend of his is no friend of mine." Wayne turned away.

Trumbell followed him, looking dazed.

"Look here," he said earnestly. "I work for Bill Black, but I'm no pal of his; probably know as little about his business as you do. He gives me orders and pays my wages, that's all. What you got against Black?"

"Never mind what, but it's enough," answered Wayne and kept on toward where Nanette and Cecile Dennison were waiting. "Better get out of

here with your men before those Italians lose their tempers again."

The padrone, who had also been following Wayne, trying to gain an opportunity to speak, now found it.

"Boss," he said, "we tak a no more orders from Black or his men. Mebbe you like us work for you?"

Wayne whirled. "What the devil could you do for me? I haven't any work."

The padrone shrugged his shoulders. "But, boss, we have do something. We got a no job, we got a no way to get home. Black's boss, he no good. We think a you fine man."

"Black's boss no good, eh?" answered Wayne. "Well, he's your only salvation, and, if you follow my advice, you'll make your peace with him."

The padrone looked at him quizzically. "That a right, boss?"

"Sure is," answered Wayne. "If Trumbell and the guides go off and leave you, you'll never find your way back; you'll starve to death, be food for the timber wolves, and you'll lose whatever pay is coming to you, even if you should happen to get out."

The padrone grinned and offered his hand.

"All right, boss," he said. "We no want a starve; we no want a lose pay."

Wayne rejoined Nanette and Cecile Dennison, leaving the padrone in conversation with Trumbell. Jacques Fordier had already joined the other guides.

"Come on, let's break away from this bunch as quick as we can," he said to Nanette.

"Do they intend to return to Arleen or are they going on to Loon Lake?" she asked as they started back toward where they had left the canoes.

"I don't know and I don't give a rap," he answered. "They can go to the devil for all of me."

Nanette looked offended. "That's all very well for those Italians, m'sieu," she said testily. "But many of those guides are my friends; you should not speak so of them."

"Well, I've lost an hour getting your friends out of a bad mess," he snapped. "That's enough."

They emerged from the bush and started to descend the bank toward the river, Wayne in the lead. Suddenly a ripping exclamation burst from his lips and he tore down toward the river's edge, mad clear through to his spine.

Their canoes were gone, both of them! The goods and camp duffle that had been unloaded preparatory to making the portage around the spot where the stream was choked with Black's rafts, were piled up on the beach just as they had left them: but no canoes.

He glanced up the green water as far as the bend; there was nobody in sight: then down. No one there, either. Nanette had reached his side.

"Somebody took the canoes while we were away," he said. "Now what are we going to do?"

Nanette looked at him coldly. "M'sieu," she said, "would it not be wise to return to Arleen by way of the pack trail? There seems to be no luck in your journey."

Wayne exploded. "Return to Arleen! I wouldn't go back now under any consideration."

He glanced at the many rafts that were wedged between the banks of the stream as he added:

"Why can't we pry loose one of these, pile our truck on it and go on in that way?"

Nanette's lip curled. "Is m'sieu able to pilot a raft through rapids worse than any we have worked yet?" she asked meaningly.

He caught her wrist, gripped so tight that she all but screamed with the hurt of it.

"No, I can't pilot a raft through rapids," he barked. "But you can, and by God, you're going to. You made a bargain to take us to Big Loon Lake; you've got to keep it, even if I have to drive you all the way with this whip."

For moments they stared into one another's eyes. Nanette's were blazing with anger as she tried to

draw her arm away and found she could not; that he held it firmly. Then she tried to drag her eyes away and found she could not do that either; his own held hers with a fascination that was irresistible. Cecile Dennison stood a short distance apart, a look of scorn on her face.

Finally, Nanette's glance fell before Wayne's and she spoke. "M'sieu, you are hurting my wrist."

Wayne unloosed his grip; he knew he had won, but there was no gleam of triumph in his eyes. It had been too easy. Blast the girl, she hadn't even made a fight. He decided there wasn't half the good stuff in Nanette Dubois that he had at first thought.

"Very well, m'sieu," she said. "We will go on as you say; but the risk is yours."

"I'll stand the risk if you'll behave," said Wayne.

Choosing one of the best of the rafts, they proceeded to the business of loading their camp outfit, lashing everything down so that there would be no danger of a spill. As the Italian party was more than a score less in number than when they had left Arleen, Wayne had no compunctions regarding taking one of their rafts. His greatest regret was that, traveling on a raft instead of in a canoe, their progress toward Fort Carillon would be slowed up somewhat.

A Marquette River raft bears very little resem-

blance to the broad affair sometimes used on southern waters. It is long and narrow, made of seldom more than six, and more often four, heavy timbers lashed together with cross pieces. It can be paddled or poled and properly loaded is, of course, practically unsinkable. It can go anywhere that a canoe can and in places that are not reachable with a canoe; but it is clumsy and slow where the canoe is graceful and swift. Still, in drifting water, and handled by an expert, it will make excellent progress. Its greatest drawback is the wash in rough weather, making it almost impossible to keep luggage or feet wholly dry.

As they swung out into the current, their positions were much the same as they had been in the canoe. Wayne sat in the bow, carrying an iron shod pole instead of a paddle; Nanette, in the stern, paddling, and Cecile amidships sitting on the goods. Traveling on the raft was more comfortable than in the canoe because there was a chance to stretch your legs.

In half an hour they came to Kicking Mule Rapids, one of the worst on the Marquette. It was a thunderous, bumping ride they made through it, far different from slipping along in the canoe. They were buffeted this way and that, thoroughly drenched

with continual spray from the very start; yet for all the discomfort, it was tremendously thrilling.

Wayne, with his pole, was obliged often to fend the raft away from rocks so that, for a good part of the journey, he could cling on only with his feet and a dozen times he was sure that he would be pitched headlong into the raging water about them. But Nanette always managed to give the stern a twist that saved him. Herself, she rode the tipsy craft as naturally and easily as an experienced person rides a bicycle, her splendid body instinctively poised to meet each bump and jolt before it came.

Cecile Dennison could cling to the ropes that lashed down the load. Twice, as they passed through, Wayne got a chance to send a swift glance back toward her.

Somewhere, she had lost her tam, her flame-of-gold hair had become unbound and it was blowing in a wild cloud about her head; but her face, as the sun shone on it, was ecstatic, her cheeks flushed, her eyes glowing. There could be no question but that all sense of fear had left her now, that she was amazingly savoring every last thrill of the journey. He found her a wonderfully appealing figure.

After working Kicking Mule rapids they tied up to the bank for dinner and then started again, keep-

ing on until late that night, when they camped in a beautiful grove of spruce.

Thus passed six uneventful but enjoyable days; old lady Marquette was kind, the weather clear, and Nanette a splendid cook.

Cecile Dennison, since the first rapids, had continued to hold herself somewhat aloof from Wayne, but that did not fret him any; in fact, he was rather pleased than otherwise. As he saw it, they had nothing in common to talk about, so why should either bother to make conversation when he, at least, appreciated silence. Thus, for most of the time, he flocked by himself, enjoyed the river when they were aboard the raft, and either slept, ate or explored the surrounding country when they were in camp.

Nanette and Cecile, he noticed, seemed to get on amazingly well together, which rather surprised him. Nanette was daily instructing Cecile in the mysteries of camp cookery and the duties that made outdoor living comfortable, work in which she appeared to take a great amount of interest. He also could not fail to notice that Cecile was changing very rapidly. The color was more continually in her cheeks; she had entirely forgotten to powder her nose for several days, and she was undoubtedly becoming muscularly more hardened. It showed in her walk and manner, in the quick sprightly way she handled her-

self. Nanette had taught her how to use the paddle and they often changed places now on the raft.

He was also picking up these same things, but doing it unconsciously and without instruction, merely by watching Nanette in her duties. Several times he tried to assist her, but she seemed to prefer the help of Cecile, which he thought queer. He felt ashamed at allowing Nanette, a woman, to do so much for him, a great deal of it that was really a man's work; but Nanette appeared to take it all as a matter of course and to expect him to spend his time in camp loafing beside the fire, smoking, though she did permit him to help manage the raft when they came to rough places in the river.

Once, in the evening, as the three of them sat beside the fire, Nanette mending a paddle, the handle of which she had that day broken, Cecile, after a long silence, said to him with a direct glance:

"You are not enjoying the trip very much, are you, Mr. Yeatman?"

He tossed a half burned cigarette into the blaze.

"What makes you think that?"

"You are so quiet," she answered. "I am finding something every foot of the way to get enthusiastic about; but you are like an Indian: nothing, except rapids, appear to stir you."

He pondered a moment, wondering if it were worth while explaining to her. Finally:

"I suppose I have become something like an Indian. You see, I've lived for many years where things were moving all the time, night and day; new faces always, a new town every twenty-four hours. Movement became an old story to me so long ago, I've forgotten when it was. Everything that comes up with a tent show, no matter what, is just a part of the day's work. If we strike mud roads—muskegs, they call 'em up here—and a cage bogs down, maybe breaks open, letting loose whatever's inside, it's apt to be quite a shock to the natives. But not to us, because it may occur a dozen times each season. We simply herd back the lions, or leopards, or snakes, whichever it happens to be, and go on getting ready for the next show."

She nodded. "I think I understand."

"Maybe you do," he thought, "but I doubt it. What you expect of a man is that he rave over everything he sees and talk to *you* all the time, no matter whether he has anything to say or not."

Then her next remark jolted that idea out of his head quicker than it had entered.

"I often realize myself that there are moments when few things can be more eloquent than silence; but don't you think you are missing a lot through

allowing your brain to become so calloused to fresh impressions?"

"Afraid I don't get you," he answered with a puzzled frown.

"Well, perhaps this will more clearly indicate what I mean," she said. "I once knew a man, an American, who was forced to spend several years in a Russian prison. All that time he didn't see a newspaper and had no communication with any one outside. As far as he was concerned, all the rest of the earth except the spot where he was incarcerated, might have been wiped off the map and he not have known it.

"Finally he was released. I met him shortly afterward. He was the happiest person I ever saw. He said his release was like visiting a new world, a world he hadn't realized before. Everything interested him; he was all eyes; he was seeing thousands of things the existence of which he had scarcely even dreamed of before; the mere feel of cool, clean, fresh air on his face, a simple thing in itself, was an unending delight. I've been getting something of that, too, in the last few days; a tremendous zest for life, of everything my eyes see."

"Oh, sure," said Wayne. "But how long will that last? I'll bet you will be as bored as ever with all this after a week or so."

"No," she answered. "I think you are wrong. The man I spoke of was released from the Russian prison seven years ago; he takes just as keen a delight in the world today as he did then. Don't you see, he's learned to savor every smallest detail of his existence, and he can't ever grow stale again."

Wayne stared thoughtfully into the fire. He was impressed; her idea had got to him, but he wouldn't confess it, simply because it had come from a woman.

"Deep stuff, too deep for me, I guess," he said with affected indifference, and began to roll a fresh cigarette.

A dozen times that evening, Wayne covertly watched Cecile, studying her where before he had been wholly indifferent, not caring whether she was near or far, or what she was busying herself about. Before, when Nanette and Cecile talked he had closed his ears to their chatter; now he found himself listening, mentally comparing the two, weighing them, but without much definite result. His usual conclusion was that they were just a couple more damn-fool women that nobody in their right senses could understand and it wasn't any use trying.

The following day at twilight they came within sight of Fort Carillon, the last outpost of civilization on the Marquette. There was no fort there now, had not been for many years; it was merely

a fur buying and outfitting station for that vast country teeming with game to the north. There was a Hudson's Bay post there and a post owned by a great French fur house. Surrounding these and bordering the river were a number of roughly built houses tenanted by employees of the two firms and by men who spent the summer season there, going deeper into the north when furs began to be prime. There was also a wireless station maintained by the Hudson's Bay people.

They planned only to stop the night at Fort Carillon, laying in a fresh stock of food, then they would keep on two hundred miles farther on the Marquette to Dry Wood portage, where they would be obliged to take to the pack trail in order to reach the Chovard tract.

Nanette beached the raft and they had started up toward the Hudson's Bay post building where a British flag was snapping in the evening breeze, when a man who had been watching their landing hailed them.

"Your name Yeatman?" he asked Wayne. "We been keeping an eye out all day for a chap answers to that name."

Wayne hesitated. His first thought was that Black was dead and the Royal Northwest Mounted Police had sent up word to hold him.

The man sensed his hesitation and smiled. Plenty of people came into the north who were not particular about having their right names generally known and it was considered good manners to respect their desires.

"It's a wireless message from the States we got for you this morning," he said reassuringly.

"My name does happen to be Yeatman," answered Wayne. "Where's the message?"

"Up at the post," answered the man. "Ask the factor, Mr. Greenough; he'll give it to you."

Wayne hurried ahead, wondering who could have had anything important enough to warrant sending a wireless from the United States. So far as he was aware, there was not a soul in the States who knew where he was: certainly he had left no forwarding address, had told no one where he intended going.

CHAPTER XIV

FROSTY BLINK

WAYNE found the Hudson's Bay post trading room crowded with people, French-Canadian trappers swapping yarns, breeds and Indians with their assorted families, bargaining for supplies before going farther north, and a few men who seemed to be neither French-Canadians nor Indians, but rather well set-up English. The others paid Wayne no attention, but the English eyed him over thoroughly.

"Reckon they'll know me the next time they see me," he thought, and inquired of one of them regarding where he could find Mr. Greenough, the factor. The man pointed to a gray-bearded individual in spectacles on the far side of the room who was selling Newhouse traps to two tall Crees.

"That's him," said the man and Wayne, as he turned away, heard him add under his breath to his two companions: "That must be Yeatman."

Wayne pushed his way through the throng toward the factor and touched him on the arm.

"My name's Wayne Yeatman; heard you had a wireless for me."

The man glanced up over his spectacles.

"Yes, believe I have," fished an envelope from the pocket of his vest and handed it to Wayne. "No charges; it came through paid."

Wayne tore open the envelope and read the message. It was from Tom Porteous.

"WAYNE YEATMAN, c/o Hudson's Bay Co., Fort Carillon, Canada.

"If party has left, please send forward. Have loaded to the gunwales with Hampex and start back at once. Can you wait for me at Fort Carillon? If not I'll follow. 'Big news; don't sell your claim under any consideration.

"T. PORTEOUS."

Wayne looked up from reading through his message the second time to find every eye in the room fastened on him. It was evident that there was very little secrecy about messages received at Fort Carillon, he thought; but, having an excellent poker face, he merely refolded the paper, thrust it into his pocket and started toward the door to leave. Half way there he heard some one call.

"Hey, Greenough, where's that guy, Yeatman? I want to see him."

Wayne turned. A diminutive little fat man with grizzled, scraggly beard that indifferently covered most of his face save the eyes and a bald head, had stepped from a side room and was staring about the

place through half closed lids that were continually winking, as if his eyes were either uncommonly sensitive to the light or he had just waked up. He was dressed in a loud patterned mackinaw and blue corduroy pants thrust into high boots.

Wayne was half minded to keep on toward the door, then thought better of it and approached the inquirer.

"I'm Yeatman; what's wanted?" he asked, not very cordially.

The man peered up into his face a moment; he was evidently near-sighted, then burst into a tremendous guffaw as he held forward a huge hand and squeaked:

"I golly, and the dead-spit of your granddaddy, too. Just as handsome, just as surly, and the same devilish eyes. My name's Frosty Blink; your grandpop, Anthony Wayne, and I were pals in ninety-eight. You're the gritty little tike that traipsed off with a tent show because your mom gave you a licking, ain't you? Many a time I've heard Anthony Wayne chuckle over that. He always said he'd remember you in his will, and I hear he has. Left you the Chovard tract, didn't he?"

Wayne was astounded. How the devil did these people come to know so much about his private

affairs? Had Black sent the news up ahead of him, or what?

For a moment he was angry, then it occurred to him that anger wouldn't help matters any and he calmed down. Besides, if this man had known his grandfather intimately, it might be possible he also knew something about the validity of his ownership of the Chovard tract. He grasped the other man's hand.

"Mr. Blink, I'm glad to meet you," he said. "Any friend of my grandfather's has, of course, a claim on me."

The man chuckled. He had a queer habit of emphasizing his words strongly, punctuating this emphasis with stabs of a fat index finger, and speaking every sentence as if it were a confidential statement he expected would pass no farther than between you and him.

"Don't want any grandson of Anthony Wayne to mister me," he said. "I'm plain Frosty Blink to everybody—they gave me that name one winter years ago when I got the snow blink and they've stuck, the blink and the name. Where you stoppin'?"

"Nowhere, yet," answered Wayne. "Wasn't expecting to remain here more than the night. I'm going on to the lake in the morning."

"Then it's settled that you bed down with me,"

said Frosty Blink cordially. "I've got a house, a housekeeper and plenty of room."

"But I've got a party," explained Wayne. "Nanette Dubois, and a young woman I've agreed to look after until we get to Big Loon Lake. I left them to come and get this wireless message."

"Nanette Dubois!" exclaimed Frosty. "Then of course you'll stop with me. Red and his daughter always stop at my place when they're holdin' over at the fort. Come on, Nanette is probably there now, and Rosalie rampagin' all over the place because I ain't to supper yit."

Wayne left the post trading room with Frosty. Once outside, he turned to him and asked:

"Look here, what do you know about my grandfather's claim to the Chovard tract? Was it clean and clear?"

"Clean as a whistle; clear as a bell," answered Frosty, "so far as I know. Why, what's botherin' your mind in that direction, boy?"

Wayne explained about having met Cecile Dennison and what he knew of her supposed ownership of the Big Loon Lake land. Frosty listened with interest, cocking his bald head first on one side and then on the other, like a bird, as he closed an alternate eye.

"Shucks, there ain't anything to that," he declared,

as Wayne finished. "I ain't never heerd of any Dennison around these parts, let alone one that owned land, and I bin here off and on for thirty years."

"But it isn't likely that her aunt is named Dennison," said Wayne. "That's the kid's name."

"Don't make no matters," said Frosty. "Nobody ever disputed your granddad's claim while he was livin' that I remember, and I don't reckon a claim made now would last ten minutes in any court of law. Forget it, boy."

"I can't do that," said Wayne. "For I want to be sure. If this kid owns that land, she's going to have it. I'll fight just as hard to see that she does get it as I will to hang on to it if it's mine."

"Man-talk," said Frosty. "You seem more like your grandaddy every minute. But, if you asked me, I'd say the whole country around Loon Lake ain't worth skinnin' a knuckle over."

"Then you don't think there's any copper there?" asked Wayne.

"Copper!" exploded Frosty. "This whole country's putrid with copper; but what good's that? No way to git it out; won't be till they build a railroad up here and that won't be in your day or mine, boy. It'll take somethin' more than copper to bull-tie and lead a railroad up to Big Loon Lake; leastwise, while copper's sellin' for anything below thirty a

pound; and them's war figgers, boy; we'll never see their like again."

"Then why are the Black-Downey interests working so hard to corral all the land they can get hold of around Big Loon Lake?" asked Wayne.

Frosty Blink cocked a wise eye. "Jest another blue-sky stock jobbin' scheme," he said. "They've exploited everything they can south of here; now they're migratin' north; think they're gettin' so far away that nobody will investigate their claims."

"Can't see it that way," said Wayne. "Black offered me too big a figure for my land. If all he was up to was a stock jobbing scheme, he wouldn't need to waste any money in buying me out."

"Not unless he wanted to impress you—and others," said Frosty sagely. "Boy, I've summered and wintered this country and I know there's money here. But it's only in something you can easily freight out, like furs. We've had this prospective copper boom, and prospective oil boom, and a lot more prospective booms, but the trouble with 'em was they *were* prospective, too darn prospective; they all petered out for the same reason; no rail line."

"Black thinks he's got a way to get copper out," offered Wayne.

"Shucks!" exploded Frosty. "A man can *think*

anything, can't he? See those Englishy-lookin' fellers down at the post tradin' room?"

Wayne nodded.

"Surveyors," continued Frosty. "Just been cruisin' this country for the gov'ment. Goin' out tomorrow. They say a rail line up here with a road bed solid enough to carry anything but the very lightest rollin' stock, and no heavy freight, would cost about ten times what it could expect to earn in a hundred years. Boy, if Bill Black acshually offered you any *real* money for your grandaddy's land and *showed* you the money, you ought to fisthook it so rapid it'd be in danger of catchin' fire with the friction."

"Well, that's what I'm up here for," said Wayne. "To find out if the land is really worth anything."

"It ain't," said Frosty decisively. "Unless you can find an easy mark."

Wayne smiled. He was getting to like this cordial little fat man with his squeaky voice, his stabbing emphases and sage opinions.

"I'm not looking for easy marks," he said. "I'd hesitate to sell it even to Black if I didn't think he'd be entirely satisfied with his bargain. But I'm not ready to sell to anybody yet. I'll hold on a little while longer."

"Stubborn," said Frosty. "Just like your grandad."

"Expect I am," said Wayne. "But it's the way they made me and I've got to fight it out along these lines. What do you know about Bill Black? What breed of pup is he?"

"Half-blooded Indian," answered Frosty. "Aside from that Black is one of the meanest scoundrels the good Lord ever allowed to encumber this earth. Everybody that knows him will confirm that statement cheerfully."

"But surely there's something decent about him," suggested Wayne. "I never yet happened to meet a man that didn't have a white spot in him somewhere, if you could find it."

Frosty shook his head. "Bill's all black," he said, "from head to heels, hide to innards—if I know him."

They had arrived in front of the largest house at Fort Carillon, a two-story building. It was Frosty Blink's home and the second of the two boarding houses in the place, though it entertained guests for only about five months of the year and then seldom more than half a dozen at a time; usually people whom Frosty called his friends. Frosty had accumulated a modest competence in trapping and fur trading and might have gone to live in the States, from where he had originally come, but he loved the

country and expected to end his days there. A sign over the door bore the legend:

FROSTY BLINK'S
Board and Lodging

Rosalie Thebault was Frosty's housekeeper and about everybody in the north knew Rosalie; it was a common saying that she could cook even an old boot tap so that it would be tender and palatable.

Just before they entered, Wayne lowered his voice and said to Frosty:

"If Nanette Dubois and the kid are here, don't say anything about my ownership of the Chovard tract."

Rosalie met them at the door. She was a vast bulk of a woman, dressed in a brown wrapper spattered with huge polka dots—a favorite pattern in the north. She had an enormous arm that would have shamed a blacksmith; yet, for all her size, she was not ill-looking, since she possessed a fresh, rosy skin, roguishly twinkling brown eyes and a handsome head of hair.

"By gar, M'sieu Frosty Blink!" shouted Rosalie in mock anger as she caught sight of him. "For the fourth time deese week you late for supper. And two guests been wait half hour; pretty girl, too; ain't you a shame?"

"All right, Rosalie, all right," squeaked Frosty. "I expected 'em." He winked at Wayne and then added to Rosalie: "You take this gent, Mr. Wayne Yeatman, in and introduce him to the girls. I'll be washed up and ready in a jiffy."

Rosalie threw back her head and burst into a laugh.

"So, M'sieu Frosty Blink, you theenk you fool me, Rosalie Thebault? By gar, them two girl don't talk 'bout anything much excep' M'sieu Yeatman ever since they come."

Rosalie's supper was enjoyable, but through it all Wayne could not fail to note a new air of aloofness toward himself on the part of Cecile Dennison. She did not speak to him unless he spoke to her first, and then only to answer with a brief yes or no.

"Wonder what's up," he thought. "Something, or she wouldn't act this way: it isn't like her; she's usually polite as pie, even when she isn't cordial."

Following the supper, Nanette went to the kitchen to help Rosalie wash the dishes and Cecile sat in Frosty Blink's parlor beside a table lamp, scanning a several days' old Quebec newspaper. Wayne caught a glimpse of her there from the dining room and entered.

He knew from her tense, nervous attitude that she

was immediately aware of his presence, but she did not look up.

"Not going to let her snub me that way," he thought, walked toward her and laid his hand on the back of her chair. She could no longer ignore him.

"Well, what's on your mind?" he asked.

She dropped the paper, arose and faced him, her lips set.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked in a bitter voice but little above a whisper.

"Tell you what?" he asked indifferently, tossing his cigarette into the fireplace.

She was an appealing figure as she stood there, the soft lamplight shining in her handsome face, making of her hair a glimmering aureole about her head; but he steeled himself against the drag of it. To him her whole manner was merely the age-old game, the woman game, a trap to catch fools and make them dance to her tune.

"Why didn't you tell me that you also had a claim to the Chovard tract at Big Loon Lake? Everybody at Fort Carillon knows it; Rosalie Thebault told me the moment your name was mentioned. Do you think it was acting a manly part to let things go on as they have with me not knowing?"

He waited a moment before answering, turning

several thoughts over in his mind, chief of which was:

"Expected me to hop right through a hoop the minute she cracks the whip. Watch me do it."

"Why should I have told you if I didn't happen to feel like it?" he asked finally. "There's a whole lot of things I might have done, but didn't. Let you go ahead on your own, and, believe me, kid, you wouldn't have gone far. Or I might have prevented you from coming up here at all; that would have been easy. Or I might have decamped with your roll and left you flat; still easier. Instead, I've played the game square, haven't I?"

Her hands were clenched with repressed anger: he was so calm and cool about the matter that it irritated her beyond measure.

"Yes, as far as that is concerned, you have played the game square; but you've been permitting me to travel with you under a misapprehension."

"Can't see it," he retorted. "It was none of my hash whether you did or didn't know; that was your lookout. You made a bargain with me; I've kept it; looks as if my responsibility ends there, doesn't it?"

She pointed to a chair. "Sit down; we've got to thrash this thing out here and now."

He stared at her a moment. Then:

"Oh, I'd just as lief stand."

Her eyes became filled with scorn. "Can't you be brutal without being ill mannered?" she asked. "Please sit down."

Hot and shamefaced, he sank into a chair, wondering: "How the devil does she get away with it?"

CHAPTER XV

OUT OF THE SKY

SHE, too, dropped back into her chair and shifted it about so that she faced him, the light at her back.

"Now I want to know what your claim to the Chovard tract is," she asked.

He fidgeted a moment, unable to decide just how much to tell her.

"Smoke, if you wish to," she went on. "I don't mind cigarettes. And take your time, for I've got to know the straight, bald facts of this thing."

"*Got* to know?" he repeated, rolling a cigarette leisurely, though his nerves were jumping a bit. This was a wholly new experience for him.

"Yes, got to," she insisted. "If you don't tell me, I shall get the facts elsewhere; but I'd rather have them from you."

"How get them elsewhere?" he temporized.

"Right about face this very night, go back to Quebec and get them," she snapped determinedly.

"Yes," he said. "You could do that; but it'd mean a lot of time and trouble; I'll save you that."

"Thank you," she said.

"Oh, no thanks due," he answered. "I'm pleasing myself. My claim to the Chovard tract came from my paternal grandfather, Anthony Wayne Yeatman. He died and left the land to me. The deed looks all right and I've been told it's clean as a whistle and clear as a bell. But——"

He paused a moment, met her glance unflinchingly over the smoke of his cigarette as he lit it and added:

"But, if you can show me that your claim is better than mine, the land is yours. I may be a lot of things, but I'm no robber of widows or orphans."

"I am neither a widow nor an orphan," she returned spiritedly. "But I have no reason to doubt my claim to the land. My aunt, Mrs. Eulalie Merode, inherited it from her husband, and I bought a nine-tenths interest from her."

"Got a deed?" he asked.

"Yes."

Wayne studied the matter a moment. "What was your uncle's name?"

"John F. Merode," she answered. "He was—well, I guess he was a professional gambler, if the truth was known."

Wayne looked suddenly interested. "John F. Merode, eh? Will you excuse me just a moment? I want to find Frosty Blink and ask him a question."

"Of course," she answered.

"I'll be back very soon," he said, leaving the room.

He found Frosty out in the kitchen swapping good natured banter with Nanette and Rosalie Thebault while he smoked a corncob pipe and toasted his stockinged feet before the oven of the cookstove, preparatory to putting on his boots and going down to the post trading store. Wayne called him aside and asked in a lowered voice:

"Ever hear of a man named John F. Merode?"

Frosty looked up, his eyes blinking through the blue smoke from his pipe.

"Jack Merode! I golly, I should say I did. Square-deal Jack, they called him. He was king of the gamblers back in the nineties, but he's dead now. Got into a fight somewhere up around the Yukon and was plugged, I heerd."

"Any chance this Jack Merode might have a claim on the Chovard tract?" asked Wayne, and he told Frosty of the relationship between Cecile Dennison and the gambler.

Frosty stared at the floor as he began pinching a lower lip thoughtfully between thumb and finger. Finally:

"I golly, I do remember now that Jack Merode and your grandaddy had an all night gambling festival one time and your grandad lost about every-

thing he had on him to Jack. But I don't recall anything about the Chovard tract being involved. As I heerd tell of the affair, there was only money on the table. Some months later, if I remember right, your grandad staged a come-back and cleaned out Jack. Old Anthony Wayne warn't no infant at shufflin' the pasteboards himself."

"I see," said Wayne. "Where can I find out the exact facts of those two particular card parties?"

Frosty cogitated the subject. Then:

"Guess Bill Black is the only man left in these parts that sat in that first night, or maybe it was the second, I don't know. You see, it was way back in ninety-six or seven, and I can't remember."

"Bill Black," repeated Wayne. "That's queer. Black has tried to buy both my claim and Miss Dennison's. I wouldn't sell; but he secured an option from her. If there had been any transfer of the Chovard tract across the gambling table Black would have known it and wouldn't be offering to buy us both out."

"He might at that," declared Frosty. "It's sometimes cheaper to buy out a lawsuit than to fight it—as Bill is findin' out in that squatter's claim he's contestin'."

Wayne returned to the room where he had left Cecile Dennison.

"I'm no nearer a solution of the matter than I was before," he said as he sank into a chair and told her of his conversation with Frosty Blink.

"As the matter stands," he concluded, "we both hold a deed to the Chovard tract; but one of the deeds must be phoney."

"I am certain that mine is perfect," she declared positively.

"Oh, sure," he answered. "You wouldn't be a woman if you didn't think that. Me, I'm still open to conviction either way."

She began to drum on the arm of her chair impatiently.

"Which seems doubtful of accomplishment at present," she said. "But how is this going to affect our business arrangement?"

He watched her face a moment, thinking: "Here's my chance to pull my freight. Shall I take it? Tom Porteous will likely be here in a day or two, and I can go on with him, relieved of all this blamed woman business. As for this kid, Nanette Dubois will look after her, and I needn't carry any load on my conscience on that score. Still and all, Nanette won't be able to help her any when it comes to a show down with Bill Black on that option affair, and in business the kid's a puling infant; worse, a blind puling infant."

She suddenly cut in on his thoughts with the direct remark: "Of course, I've no intention of begging off on *my* bargain, but have you on yours?"

He colored, couldn't help it. She had seemed to read his thoughts; it was uncanny. Now, of course, he couldn't pull out, not with any sort of grace; but it was humiliating to have her put the matter this way, shift all the responsibility onto his shoulders. She seemed always to be doing that, and so easily, too; he resented it.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I thought it was you began this argument; I don't seem to remember starting it."

"I didn't fancy the idea of your agreeing to look after me and keeping your claim to the Chovard tract secret," she said defensively. "More especially since you knew of my counter claim from the very first."

"Don't see how that need affect our arrangement," he said. "Nothing is changed except that you know something you didn't know before. I've told you that if your claim proves good there won't be any opposition from me; and from now on I'll keep all my cards on the table."

"Very well," she said. "What then are your present plans?"

"I'd like to remain here for a day or two, if you

don't mind?" he said. "That wireless was from a friend of mine who expects to reach Fort Carillon soon and wants me to wait his coming."

A puzzled frown came hovering about her eyes and he added hastily, drawing the wireless message from his pocket:

"And to prove to you that I really do mean to play square, as I said, with all my cards on the table, I'll show you the message."

She hesitated before taking it, studying his face.

"You don't have to show me this," she said. "I can't expect to know all of your affairs."

"Better read it."

She read the wireless with thoughtful eyes, read it, as he had, twice, before she looked up.

"Of course I get the general drift," she said. "But this isn't very clear to me."

"I'd better tell you about this chap, Porteous," he said, and went on to do so, keeping back nothing.

"As I see it now," he concluded, "Black is either trying to carry through some tremendously big mining plan, or he's attempting to put over a whale of a fake. Tom Porteous, when he comes, may have the clew, and he may not. My own opinion is that Black has got hold of something really big; I can't see his offer to you and me in any other light; but I may be entirely wrong. Frosty Blink thinks I am,

and Frosty is a mighty wise old bird; he knows this country, and he knows Bill Black from A to izzard. The way I reason it out is this: there is oodles of copper there and Black has, as he says, found a way to freight it out. My faith in that is one of two reasons why I wouldn't sell to him; why I was so thundering mad when I found he had wheedled you into giving him a two hundred thousand dollar option on your claim."

"One of the two reasons—what is the other?"

He hesitated. "Well, knowing about your claim, it seemed to me more desirable, if there was to be any scrap over the land, that you should fight it out with me instead of with Black. Black is wholly unscrupulous, if not an absolute crook; you would stand no show at all with him."

Impulsively, she rose and offered him her hand; her eyes were shining.

"You do mean to play fair, don't you? I have believed that from our first meeting. And I realize now what a baby I am; it was fortunate that I met you and I'm tremendously grateful. But——"

She hesitated as he threw aside his cigarette, shook her hand and released it.

"But what?" he asked.

"But I'm afraid we shall always dispute. I'm accustomed to having my own way."

"Sometimes bound to have it, even though you know your way is wrong?"

"I suppose I am," she said. "I was brought up like that; petted and pampered; my way was always supposed to be right. Everything was done for me; I was always a baby kept in cotton wool. A little while ago I woke up, began to realize conditions; that's why I wanted to come up here alone, that I might get a better hold on myself, have more backbone. But, somehow, I don't seem to be accomplishing much."

There were tears just beneath her lids as she looked up into his face. Suddenly, she started back with a shudder and a gasp and stared down at his hands. He thought she was going to faint. Then she recovered herself.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"The strangest thing," she answered, drawing a quick breath. "For an instant I thought you had that long, black whip in your hand."

The faintest trace of a smile hovering about his usually grim mouth, he showed her his open hands.

"You see, nothing there," he said.

"I see now," she answered. "But for a moment I was sure. I must be getting fancies."

"You're tired," he said. "Better go to bed. I'm going down to the trading post; I want to talk with

some of those English surveyors before they go out, if I can get the chance."

"Then it's settled," she said, as he started to leave the room, "that we wait here until your friend, Tom Porteous, arrives?"

"A while, anyway," he answered, "though I shan't waste a devil of a lot of time waiting."

She watched him go, a queer look on her shadowed face, half frown, half wonder. She had never happened to encounter just his sort before, though they might be common enough. He was primeval, sometimes frankly brutal, yet he was every inch a man. In a way he was fascinating, somewhat, perhaps, because he had, so far, failed to capitulate before those womanly wiles that she had found so effective with other males she had met.

Any man she had previously known, placed in such close association with her as Wayne Yeatman had been, would have started making love to her long ago; she was certain of that. At least, he would have been covering her with sweet flattery and pretty compliments—and he would have held her hand when she offered it; he would not have dropped it immediately, as Wayne had.

This man, not only had he made no love to her, he had not even paid her the tribute of a single, tiny,

left-handed compliment. So far as she was able to judge, he thought her rather a useless little fool.

"Well, isn't that about what I am?" she reflected, and the frown on her handsome face deepened.

The thought made her angry, first with herself, then with him. She bit her lip and clenched her hands until the nails hurt her palms.

"He's so tremendously conceited that he doesn't realize any one save himself exists on earth," she reflected.

Then: "No, that isn't fair; he doesn't act in the least conceited; he's as natural as an animal, and he certainly has looked after me in a thoroughly competent and thoughtful manner.

"But he's so damned unimpressionable." There was so much exhilaration in the expletive that she was almost minded to follow it with a few more vigorous ones she had heard on occasion. "So bitterly cold and distant; can't the man thaw, or be thawed?"

With that thought she went to bed, but she was neither tired now nor in any mood for sleep; she was at odds with everybody on earth, most of all with herself.

Wayne, on his part, walking toward the Hudson's Bay trading station, was revolving in his mind that matter of the two deeds to the Chovard tract. He

felt morally certain that his was valid; yet she appeared even more positive that hers was. He wished now that he had asked if she carried her deed with her and compared them; it was possible that would throw some light on the matter. Also, he thought a great deal about that wireless from Tom Porteous. Had the lad come upon anything definite, or was his optimistic message just a result of his natural good spirits?

Arriving within sight of the post trading station, Wayne saw a huge fire in front of the building and around it a crowd of men and women. He inquired of the first person he met, a French-Canadian trapper:

"What's the trouble; somebody's cabin catch fire?"

The fellow began waving his arms excitedly as he cried:

"By gar, no: first fly machine, she come Fort Carillon! I go home for get my wife and six keed for show her to him before she all burn up."

Wayne hurried ahead and joined the crowd. An enormous biplane had caught fire and was burning, around it a ring of wonder-eyed men and women. They had read of aeroplanes, but this was the first to travel so far north.

Wayne had scarcely stepped within the ring where

the light could shine on his face when Tom Porteous gripped his hand and cried:

"Hello, Yeatman; just the man I wanted to see. Let's get out of this mob; got a whale of a story to tell you. But wait a moment; better meet my friend Dan Hallerton first. That's his aeroplane going up in smoke there. Met him at Quebec; Château Frontenac; he was preparing to fly to Fort Carillon, chasing after a chicken, I believe, and agreed to bring me along. The blamed contraption caught fire just as we reached here, or we'd never known enough to make a landing."

Porteous began shouting Hallerton's name. A tall man in leather coat and leather aviation helmet answered and came toward them.

He was slim, pale featured, and had long limbs; he did not look in the least like a man who would be piloting an aeroplane farther into the north than one had ever gone before. His features now had a drawn and anxious look. The moment he caught sight of Porteous, he cried:

"Can't stop a minute. Just got news of her. She landed here today on a raft with a man and a woman guide named Nanette Dubois. They're stopping at a place called Frosty Blink's. I'm off for there at once."

Wayne's every muscle stiffened. This man was

undoubtedly referring to Cecile Dennison. What business had he with her? Why had he flown a thousand miles at the risk of life to overtake her? Was he an emissary of Black's, or was he that man from whose proposal of marriage she had fled before starting north?

CHAPTER XVI

HIGH STAKES

As Hallerton hurried away, Porteous turned to Wayne, a blank look on his features.

"Sweet cement!" he exclaimed in consternation. "Have I put my foot into it? Is that chap looking for the same girl that came to the Hotel Marquette with you?"

Wayne's face was grim. "Looks like it," he answered. "What does he want with her, do you know?"

"Heard she was going into Ungava all on her wild lone, and is chasing after her to bring her back. That's about all I know," said Porteous, adding, rather lamely, "Maybe he's her brother."

"Not very likely," said Wayne. "Her name is Dennison, Cecile Dennison; or, at least, that was what she told me."

"Oh!" said Porteous, in a relieved tone. "Then this business between you two isn't a case of the fond lovers fleeing before the irate family?"

"Nothing like it," answered Wayne. "I met her

on the train just before we arrived at Green's Coulé, and, being alone and green, knowing nothing of the country, she hired me to look after her as far as Big Loon Lake. That's all of that. But she holds a counter claim against mine to the Chovard tract and Bill Black has been trying to buy her out; I didn't know but that chap might be an employee of Black's."

"He's Dan Hallerton, only son of P. J. Hallerton of the Canadian Pacific railroad; oodles of money," said Porteous. "He knows Black, but how thick they are I couldn't say. Now I suppose you want me to explain that wireless?"

"Sure do," said Wayne. "What did it mean?"

"Just this. When I got to New York I found a half dozen different brokerage houses were accumulating all the Hampton Exploration stock they could get; not bidding against each other, you understand —nobody else seemed to care a hoot about Hampex, and considered any man a fool who would buy it— but just raking in all they could at the lowest possible price. They secured a good share of their stock by sending agents out into the back districts to see Farmer Ben, Storekeeper Jim and their like, men who had loaded up when Hampex was supposed to be worth something. These greenies were unsus-

picious, of course, and glad to get any figure for a stock they felt sure was worthless."

"But surely they couldn't work that plan very long without arousing suspicion," said Wayne.

"They sure couldn't," answered Porteous. "The very day I landed in New York, Hampex was beginning to wriggle, show signs of uneasiness. But it was a creeping market, still is, because nobody really knows anything yet. There are rumors everywhere, thick as flies in August, but nary a rumor that anybody can run down and find a fact pinned on it. I honestly believe I was the only man in New York who had a suspicion that there was anything real behind the Hampex buying."

"What did you do?" asked Wayne.

"Do?" cried Porteous. "I gathered in every cent I could beg, borrow or steal, and bought Hampex on margin at one dollar a share. I've coralled one hundred and eighty thousand shares for myself, and I've bought twenty thousand shares for you."

"Great hokum!" exploded Wayne. "I couldn't pay you back your margin deposit on those twenty thousand shares if it was only a mill each. I'm broke."

"Forget it!" said Porteous. "I got a wire at Quebec that Hampex had already gone to one fifteen. Wait till the real news of what Black is up to gets

out; Hampex will skyrocket to par and then—sweetly suffering angels! Think what your twenty thousand shares will return to you—a million demned pretty dollars, as Mr. Mantalini would say."

Wayne refused to be carried off his feet.

"But this whole thing may fizzle out and the market slump to nothing before you can get an order in to sell."

"Suppose it does," answered Porteous. "We'll have had the big adventure—and we'll still retain our ravishing youth and beauty; what more do you want?

Wayne shook his head dubiously and told Porteous of Frosty Blink's opinion of the Big Loon Lake district.

"An old croaker," said Porteous. "You meet 'em everywhere. For every rooter there's always a roaster. That's what makes a stock market."

"Looks to me as if, after loading up with one hundred and eighty thousand shares of Hampex, you ought to have remained in New York to watch for the right time to shoot in a selling order," offered Wayne after a moment's thought on the matter.

"Yes, down there I'd get cold feet at the first slump. No, I'm here to figure out a precise line on what Black has up his sleeve; then I'll know what to do; wait or take my profits. But, at that, I'm

not going back to New York; it's too near the wild rumor source; a chap loses his head. There's a wireless here at the fort and I've left orders with my broker to keep me posted on how things are going. As for selling, I don't intend to sell unless I find there's no bottom in Black's scheme. I'm going to hang on to my Hampex; at least until it touches par. What's the use in being a piker. I'm out for my nine million or nothing. Nine million! Hasn't that a sweet sound?"

"Big ideas, lad; big ideas!" commented Wayne. "Your head is sure in the clouds."

"I should think it was big ideas; something worth fighting for, high stakes, I'll tell the world, nine million! Here's my plan; you keep on to Loon Lake, find out what's doing up there and get word to me here at Fort Carillon. I'll slip the news to New York. Then we will lay back and watch Hampex climb. When she touches par, I'll wireless down a selling order—quick as that. I'm no hog, I know when I've got enough, and nine million ought to satisfy any man."

"All right," agreed Wayne. "I'll pull out in the morning and work as rapidly as possible."

The idea of a million dollars profit for himself had a tremendously exhilarating tang, like the sudden possession of a wishing ring; Porteous' enthu-

siasm was getting to Wayne at last. Yet a million for himself might be only a fraction of the story. If Black had come upon something tremendously big at Loon Lake, Wayne's land, adjoining Black's, as it did, might be worth millions in itself.

Wayne Yeatman's train of thought came to an abrupt halt. Did he, if the real truth were known, own a foot of land up there? For the instant, he permitted the idea of so much money to blind him to his customary sense of justice and all the fighting blood in him cried out that the land must be his whatever her claim. What was she, only a fool woman; she'd marry the first fortune seeking male that came along, perhaps this Hallerton, and it would be he would eventually get the whole thing.

Then came a swift shaming reversal of thought. No, by the mother that bore him, he would not go back on his original intention. He had lived four-square with all the world so far, male and female alike, and so would he live to the end, though the Chovard tract proved to be worth a hundred million and he lost it all to her. If it was hers, she should have it—and marry whom she pleased.

Somehow, for just a fleeting breath, that last consideration hurt, keenly; but, with grimly set mouth he fought down both the thought and the hurt, and faced Porteous.

"If I'm to make an early start, it's time I was turning in. Guess I'll be going along to Frosty Blink's."

Porteous had already told him that he and Hallerton had arranged to stop with the Hudson's Bay post factor, so the two parted, Wayne agreeing to see Porteous before he left in the morning.

Admitted to Frosty Blink's by Rosalie Thebault as she was about to follow Nanette Dubois and Frosty, who had both gone down to the trading station to see the wonderful flying machine, Wayne was aware of two people talking in the parlor. He thought the voice of one was Cecile Dennison, and he supposed the other was Hallerton. Just past the door he heard someone call.

"Mr. Yeatman, won't you please come in here a moment?"

He retraced his steps and entered the parlor. Cecile Dennison and Dan Hallerton were standing, one on each side of the fireplace in which several huge pine logs blazed. Wayne had never seen Cecile when she appeared more alluring than now as she stood within the crimson glow of the fire, dressed in a becoming negligée, her flame-of-gold hair a brightly shining cloud about her head.

Hallerton had discarded the leather coat and the aviation helmet. He had dark hair and large dark

eyes. Without the leather coat he appeared extraordinarily thin, though perhaps his height and length of limb accentuated this appearance somewhat. He was undoubtedly college bred, undoubtedly society nurtured, a cleanly polished young man accustomed to having everything that unlimited money could purchase.

Wayne somehow gathered at once that Cecile had recently been in this young man's arms, also that she had told Hallerton a lot about him, Wayne Yeatman; he thought he could read those things in both their faces. Probably Hallerton had inquired much about him; if he was her lover, that was what he would naturally do. Perhaps he had been raising a row because Cecile had gone north with Wayne, though Wayne could see no signs of anything of that sort—and he looked for them.

"I want you to meet my friend, Dan Hallerton, Mr. Yeatman," said Cecile as Wayne entered. "Mr. Hallerton thinks I ought to return to Quebec with him; says it is neither safe nor seemly, my keeping on. I've told him that it has been perfectly ripping so far and that I don't want to go back."

Then she turned to Hallerton and added: "I've a lot of confidence in Mr. Yeatman, in his judgment and his actions. As I've told him, he isn't par-

ticularly amiable, but he seems thoroughly competent, and he has looked after me splendidly."

At the introduction, Hallerton had offered his hand. Wayne took it, and their eyes met. Hallerton was smiling, the well-bred, meaningless smile of courtesy. Wayne wasn't; he was studying the man.

"So polished he glitters, and I'll bet he's as flat as he is polished," was his thought. "Of course he's just the sort her sort would take to."

"Let me tell you, Cecile is giving you a pretty strong recommendation," said Hallerton. "Don't believe she'd say that much of me. But look here, Yeatman, do you think it is safe up here? I've heard some rather loud reports about the country. Hell's Doorway, I believe they call the trail into Ungava, don't they?"

Wayne nodded. "It's all of that, and it isn't safe, not for a woman," he declared bluntly.

"There, I've got that off my chest," he thought, and added: "But my ideas and yours, Mr. Hallerton, of whether a woman should always live safely, may be totally different. I've been taking chances all my life; I expect to take a lot more before I die, though perhaps not of the same sort, and I believe it benefits everybody, man or woman, to take them. You're an aviator; you ought to understand that."

Quite unconsciously, Wayne was pleading. Before, he had not thought he cared two hoots whether Cecile Dennison kept on into Ungava or what became of her. Now, since Hallerton's appearance, he was discovering that he wanted her to keep on, and with himself.

"Of course Dan understands that," said Cecile, facing Hallerton and laying one hand on his arm. "As for its benefiting me, I was like a first stage consumptive when I started; frail as a flower, pale as milk. Now look at me! I'm getting hard as nails and brown as a berry. Dan, I've actually learned that there's a world of satisfaction in a good, hearty damn. Fact. You should hear me sometimes."

Hallerton was visibly wavering.

"Of course it's not a bit of use to argue if you're set on going," he declared lamely. "But, just the same, you must realize that it's sheer foolishness, Cecile."

Wayne smiled cynically. "The good old baby-doll stuff gets in its work as per usual," he thought. "He's as impressionable as that train conductor. What he ought to do is to twist her ear smartly and say: 'Damn you, kid, you're going to travel right back to Quebec with me; that's what *you're* going to do.' "

"Of course it isn't any use," she said with a ges-

ture of finality. "So why waste your energy in trying? You'd better say nighty-night, Dan, and go to your stopping place for forty winks. I can tell by your eyes that you haven't slept for ages. I've got to talk over some business about the trip with Mr. Yeatman."

She turned Hallerton about playfully and pushed him toward the door, adding: "Toddle along, old dear, and get your beauty sleep; I'll see you in the morning."

"But, Cecile——" Hallerton protested.

"But me no buts," she interrupted, kissed the tips of her fingers, reached up and laid them on his lips, turned to Wayne and asked:

"What time are you planning for our start?"

Wayne looked at her and frowned, waited until he heard the door close behind Hallerton. Then:

"See here, kid, I stood up for you before your friend, but I'm not so blamed sure that *you* ought to start at all."

She stiffened suddenly. "Well, why not? You didn't talk like that a moment ago."

"I suppose you're engaged to marry that chap, aren't you?" he asked.

"No, I'm not," she answered, her eyes narrowing. "He's the man I told you of that has asked me a lot of times, and he asked me again tonight, but I

didn't say yes. Even if I had, I failed to see how that would affect my going on to Big Loon Lake."

Wayne was cornered; he had to wait and study the matter a moment before he could answer. Finally:

"It seems to me it would have a lot to do with it. If you were engaged to him—or if you ever expect to be—you ought to consider his opinion pretty carefully."

"Perhaps," she half agreed. "But considering another's opinions and following them are two very different matters. To speak frankly with you, I don't think Dan Hallerton's ideas of how women should conduct themselves are worth a hill of beans. There aren't any such things as *real* women with him: they're all babies, to be coddled, comfied and delicately nurtured. I used to think women ought to be treated that way, too; but I don't any longer."

She studied Wayne's puzzled face a moment before she came closer and added, laying one hand on his arm:

"Please give me credit for having developed a little since you first met me, Mr. Yeatman."

Her voice was wistful and in the wind-soft eyes of her he thought he caught the gleam of a wondrous light. Never, with a woman, had Wayne yet been overcome with that tempest of emotion that is

the heritage of every normal male: now it came, in a vivid, blinding flash, and there was the thudding beat of a million predatory horsemen in his vigorously racing blood.

Abruptly, scarcely knowing what he did, he caught her in his arms, and was raining kisses on her mouth before realization came.

For one fleeting instant, she suffered his lips, as if she were unable to resist the force of him. Then, her great eyes blazing, she fought him away as she cried:

"How dare you take this advantage of me?"

The revulsion within himself was as abrupt as had been the oncoming. The mere touch of her hand had been fire, but, with her first struggle, the fire had turned cold more quickly than it had been born. He thrust her roughly aside with curling lips as he cried:

"Damn you, don't you know you can't play with flames? I ought to break you for making such an accursed fool of me."

Her own lip curled at this. "Well, why not; it would be rather like."

He whirled on her, breathing hard, his overwhelming anger at the injustice held in leash by a mere thread.

"No, it wouldn't be like, and you know it. You're

not a bit different from the rest of women; you think you can tempt a man only just so far as you desire him to come."

He waited a moment, catching the breath that had been almost strangling him. Then, tensely:

"There isn't a soul in the house save ourselves; the rest have all gone down to see the burning aeroplane. If I had been the man you think me, I could have had my way with you as easy as that!" He snapped an indifferent finger as he turned and left the house, slamming the outer door violently behind him.

He wanted air, air uncontaminated by the presence of any woman. He hated her as he had never hated a human being before.

With his leaving, she sank into a chair beside the table, laid her head on her arms and burst into a paroxysm of tears and sobs that seemed to shake her whole body.

CHAPTER XVII

WHOSO SPEAKS

WAYNE shook himself as might a shaggy dog that had just left the water, drew in deep breaths of the cool night air and started walking rapidly.

He felt unutterably helpless and stifled; his powerful hands contracted with an overwhelming desire to choke Cecile Dennison until she was as limp and lifeless as had been the snow leopard that had clawed his face. The hurt in him was even deeper than that injury, for Cecile had not done what she had in self-defense.

As he saw it, contact with Hallerton had aroused her, and the luring of him, Wayne, on to make a fool of himself had only been an expression of her accursed sex vanity, the Eve inherited vanity that demands continual tribute, that takes all, gives as little as possible, that beckons temptingly, only to recede at every advance of the male.

That her heart actually said what her eyes did, that she might have really cared for him, even for the moment, that she might have expected something

infinitely finer than he had been able to give and had been frightened by his ardor, were thoughts that had no existence in Wayne Yeatman's brain chambers.

For hours he walked on and neither knew nor cared where he was going; his legs carried him ahead automatically, without brain impulse—his eyes saw nothing; he sensed only the bitterness that filled his soul, a blind, unreasoning hate and contempt for everything related to the name woman.

Finally, he awoke to a realization that early dawn was breaking and that he was in unfamiliar territory. The sky was overcast and he had lost all sense of direction. He sat down to study the situation.

"If I retrace my steps I ought to strike the river; then I'll be all right," he decided. "I've read somewhere that if you follow a stream anywhere in the world, you're bound, sooner or later, to arrive at a human habitation."

He arose and started, walked stubbornly on until his watch told him he had been traveling six hours, and still there was no sign of the river, only unending spruce, broken occasionally by patches of stunted pine. Had he been forest wise, he would have known that he was getting into higher altitudes instead of moving toward the river.

His stomach began to assert itself persistently.

He collected dry wood, piled it in the lee of a huge rock, touched a match to it and sat down beside the fire to rest his already aching limbs, aware for the first time that he was actually lost.

"Ought to have left a trail behind me," he reflected. "Then at least, I could have followed the blaze back to my starting point and tried some other direction."

It began to rain, a mild drizzle at first. With his pocket knife he cut spruce boughs and managed to arrange a passable shelter against the rock and beside his fire. But the rain soon began to fall in torrents and a lot of the water came through, for he was unskilled and did not know how to place the boughs of his improvised leanto so that they would shed water properly. Twice he tried to mend it and got pretty thoroughly wet himself. After a while, his wood gave out and he had to collect more; he got still wetter in that process, but that did not bother him so much now as did the gnawing hunger at the pit of his stomach. He tried chewing a few leaves, but they failed to help much and cigarettes only aggravated it.

Came night and the rain was still a downpour. He collected what dead wood he could find in the vicinity and piled it on the fire, then topped this with a great mound of green stuff cut with the pocket-

knife he had used so much now that both hands were blistered.

"That ought to keep it going until morning," he thought, and dropped asleep in his wet clothes from sheer weariness.

He awoke shivering at the first sign of early dawn, discovered that it was raining as hard as ever, and that his fire had gone out hours before.

There was not even a remnant of glowing coals; the small wood he had been able to cut with his pocket-knife had made a hot blaze while it lasted, but that was not long; the rain had done the rest.

"Should have dragged up some heavy logs," he thought. "God, how much there is a man don't know and doesn't know he don't know until he comes to a situation where the knowledge is needed. I suppose an Indian in my situation would have found the home tepee hours ago."

The gnawing at his stomach had subsided, but his brain processes seemed crystal clear and tremendously stimulated.

"No use to prospect for a way back until the rain stops and I can see the sun, get a sense of direction," he concluded; managed to repair his shelter so that it shed water fairly well, and dragged up several heavy lengths of down trees to the new fire he built with

his last match. That fire he was determined should not go out again until he had no further use for it.

"This blamed rain can't last forever," he reflected. Yet it appeared determined to do so. Three days he hugged his shelter, kept his fire burning and the rain still persisted. And now he began to believe that he had made a serious error in remaining there instead of traveling on, even though it did rain, for his strength was leaving him. He could no longer drag up heavy logs to feed the fire, and when he attempted to cut green stuff his hands trembled weakly with the exertion.

Keeping the fire alight now became an obsession with him; he neglected sleep for it and began to gather and hoard wood as a miser might hoard gold. Somehow, his whole life seemed bound up in that comforting blaze. He sat staring into it for hours, poking in one stick at a time, experimenting to discover how little fuel he could use and still keep the fire going, thinking, dully, of events that had happened years and years ago, reviewing his boyhood, its mistakes and its transitory successes, wondering why he had not had sense enough to do one thing when he had done another.

He began to realize what an error his running away from home with the animal show had been and to think of his mother.

"Stubborn little cub," he reflected. "Don't remember what she thrashed me for, but I haven't a doubt I deserved it. Know I deserved it a lot of times when she didn't thrash me. I was like that snow leopard, Vixen, that clawed my face, I couldn't stand the whip. Mother ought to have understood that. Still and all, I don't know; I reckon one thing about everybody has to learn is to stand the lash without sulking, flinching or fighting back; life is bound to give it to us, one time or another, and there's only one right way to take it—if it's due us—with determination to profit by the sting.

"Vixen fought back and she got hers. I had to give it to her or she'd have done for me completely the next time she found the chance. I sulked and ran away, and I expect I've been paying for it all these years, for it's been a pretty tough life, and with nothing to show for it except these scars on my hands and face. Reckon I ought to have had sense enough to quit the show business long ago, gone back home and tried to really amount to something. She was a blamed good woman, if she did thrash me. Wish I'd had a chance to tell her so before she died."

He began to review his experiences with the animal show, study it in the new and clearer vision that had come to him.

"It was the cheap tinsel and the glamor got me,"

he thought. "I was meat for that, and I loved the fight and thrill of it. A sort of dissipation, I suppose, but what did it amount to? I just drifted from one day into another, as short sighted as a butterfly, if I'd only known, really getting nowhere, just living in the sunshine. If Grandfather Yeatman hadn't left me this land up here, I'd be flat broke. Maybe I am as it is, if the kid has the right claim."

This switched him off onto a trail of thought about Cecile Dennison.

"If I don't get out of this, wish there was some way of letting the blamed kid know she is welcome to that land. She's a pretty square little guy, after all; played me a while, but what of that? I guess this love business with women is like angling for trout with us men; there's no fun unless the fish are game, and the gamier they are the more we enjoy playing them."

The wood was getting low and he dragged himself out in the rain to secure more. It was heartbreaking labor; his wrists were so weak that he had to hack at a limb for a long time before it would fall away. Yet, panting for breath, he hung grittily to the work.

The rain blinding his eyes, he was kneeling, cutting at the butt of a small tree, when suddenly the

knife slipped. He felt a tiny intermittent stream of something warm playing on his cold cheek.

He looked down, saw that blood was coming from his wrist and knew from the beat of it, in time with his heart, that he had severed an artery. For an instant he was faint and giddy. Then came quick realization that giving way to that meant certain death, and he pulled himself together. Taking a deep breath, he dropped his knife, turned back his sleeve and gripped the left arm above the cut with his right hand, gripped with all the strength that was left to him, pressing his thumb upon the artery until the spurting stream of blood wavered, sank, stopped.

So far so good, but he knew his weakness would allow him to hold that grip but a short time, surely not long enough for a clot to form. He must get back to his shelter and manage to so bind the arm that there would be constant pressure above the severed artery. That was going to be something of a job to accomplish with only one hand. Could he finish it before loss of blood rendered him unconscious? he wondered.

Feeling as if a thousand tiny white hot hammers were pounding inside his head and above his eyes, he staggered back toward his shelter, was halfway there when he fell and had to finish the distance by dragging himself along on one elbow while he still

gripped the arm, for he had not strength enough to arise.

He reached there finally and after many rests. Came the most difficult part of the operation. Using his teeth and two fingers, loosening his thumb pressure on the artery for but a second at a time, he managed to bind his twisted handkerchief about the arm just above the wrist, inserting a short piece of wood over the artery where it would press upon it.

After tremendous effort, he drew the knot tight, watched the crimson stream subside and sank back, so tremblingly weak he could scarcely lift his chest to breathe.

He lay there for many moments, too listless to even think, no more than on the borderland between sensibility and unconsciousness. He was aware that he had lost a lot of blood; that that, coupled with his long abstinence from food, rendered his condition even more desperate than it had been before. Yet, for all this, there was no thought in his brain of giving up; no shadow of doubt but that he would pull through somehow—until he happened to glance toward the fire and he saw that it was getting perilously low.

"Reckon that's my finish," he thought as he tried again and again to lash his inert muscles into reaching for more wood and putting it on the fire, only to

find that they would not respond, that the brain impulse seemed to reach no deeper than just below his eyes.

For a space of time that appeared to be ages, he lay there, helplessly watching the flames sink lower and lower. Hope had forsaken him; it was as if the thinking part of him were a disembodied spirit watching the body that was him as it slowly died. flickered out as did the fire.

He wanted to shout with the agony of it, but the voice expired in his throat. Finally, he began to see faces in the flames. Bill Black's evil features leered at him; then drowned Giuseppi, and Nanette Dubois, a curiously unfathomable gleam in her darkly slumberous eyes. And last, after the flames had died down until there was only a bed of warm coals, it was Cecile Dennison's face smiled toward him from the crimson fireglow. A single sentence began to drum repeatedly through his head:

"Whoso speaks to me in the right voice, him will I follow as the tides the moon, silently around the earth."

"Who the devil said that?" he called.

There was no answer. only the sullen beat of the rain.

Then, after many moments, "Wonder if it's true;

wonder how the right one will speak to the blamed little kid?"

With that and the dying of the last glowing coal, his train of thought changed abruptly, for he had come upon a surprising fact: that in all the world there was but one woman for him and that he loved her more than he had ever imagined that he could love anybody. And the thought hurt tremendously, for now he believed her to be wholly beyond his reach; he had hurt her, frightened her away by being a brute when he should have been a man.

"I must tell her," he cried, and struggled desperately to reach the dead fire, to fan it into life before it was too late.

It was futile effort; the darkness crashed relentlessly down upon him and there was no more thought or dreams or anything.

CHAPTER XVIII

HE LEARNED ABOUT WOMEN

A SHRILL voice within Wayne Yeatman's brain seemed to say, repeatedly:

"Dreenk! Dreenk! Dreenk!"

He opened his eyes. A taciturn featured Indian squaw was holding a tin cup to his lips.

He drank. It was raw whiskey, squirrel whiskey, fiery hot; it choked him so that he could scarcely regain his breath and half of it went down inside his shirt instead of his throat. But it, at least, sufficed to give him a spurt of temporary energy.

He tried to sit up, found he could not and sank back, a thousand stars dancing before his sight.

After a moment's rest, he opened his eyes again, looked about him and managed to ask:

"Where the devil did you come from and where are we?"

He was lying on the bank beside a narrow stream; there was a canoe beached nearby with a man and a child in it, both Indian, he judged.

The squaw shook her head, saying: "*Non com-*

pren', m'sieu," and followed this with a flood of talk from which Wayne could pick out no word that he understood.

The woman pointed up the stream with many gestures, then down. Wayne gathered that she was asking him either where he came from or where he wanted to go. Since both of these questions could be answered with the same two words, he began repeating them.

"Fort Carillon! Fort Carillon! You *compren'*"

The Indian woman smiled and nodded, shouted something to the man, who also nodded, but did not smile; then the child began to nod gravely, like a Chinese image with a balanced head, which it very much resembled, except for the dirt.

"You get me, eh?" said Wayne.

The woman nodded again, lifted him in her arms, carried him toward the canoe and laid him in it, his head pillowed on a great hunk of raw meat. She was short and fat, yet she seemed to possess the strength of two men. Wayne did not know that she had already carried him on her back a matter of fifteen miles and that together with the more edible portions of a moose that her better half in the boat had shot near the same spot where she had found Wayne lying unconscious beside his dead fire.

They started off down the stream which Wayne

decided must be a small river that emptied into the Marquette, since it was too narrow to be the main highway. The canoe had passed but a little way through when things began to slip from him. He fought to hold on; it was no go.

Came many days during which life to him was largely phantasmagoric dream. He was struggling under a siege of double pneumonia from the delirium of which he emerged only at intervals to realize that he was being nursed by Rosalie Thebault and Cecile Dennison. It was for the cool touch of Cecile's soft hand on his burning forehead he continually watched and a score of times the beryl-gray eyes of her kept the fight in him when it seemed as if he could struggle for breath no longer.

Followed a time when he had broken the door of death, his mind was clearer and only Rosalie attended him. It was then he learned how gentle, quiet and thoughtful a woman can be, even when she is as big, boisterous and strong as was Rosalie Thebault. It seemed rather nice to be babied, even though he were a grown man.

"Rosalie, you're an A-number-one brick," he said to her. "But what has become of my other nurse?"

A look of grave concern overspread Rosalie's smiling features as she answered:

"So soon as she sure you out of danger, ma'am-

selle, she start for Loon Lake with Nanette Dubois. Nanette, she say that if they expec' for make the lake and return before winter freeze up everything, they better start. Ma'amselle, she don' want for go yet, but Nanette talk her into eet. Me, I don' know what come over that Nanette Dubois lately; she like stray cat, she got only scratch for everybody."

Wayne straightened up quickly in the chair Rosalie had placed for him before the window where the sun shone and into which she had lifted him. Cecile gone north with Nanette and Nanette in a temper! The thing had a grim look; he did not like it.

"Where's Tom Porteous?" he asked.

"M'sieu Porteous, he wait roun' the fort," answered Rosalie. "He want for see you every day, but me, I don' let nobody come in room when I take care sick folk, not even Rouge Dubois." Rosalie uttered a soft clicking chuckle as she added, "An' Rouge, he say he break my head if I don' let him see you. Me, I like for see that Rouge Dubois try break my head; I bet, me, I show heem where he get off, pretty quick."

"Rouge Dubois—is he here?" asked Wayne.

Rosalie's face colored. "Yes, he say this time we get married if he have to stick aroun' ten years."

"Well, you find Tom Porteous and tell him I want

to see him, damn quick," said Wayne. "And after that I want to see Rouge Dubois."

"Mebbe, m'sieu, I let you see M'sieu Porteous today, but not that rascal, Rouge Dubois; hee's too much excite over something, I don' know what."

With that Rosalie left the room. An hour later, the door opened to admit Tom Porteous.

"Sweet cement, old man, but I'm glad to see you," he said, advancing with outstretched hand and a grin. "You're looking fine."

"Feeling fine, too," answered Wayne. The mere sight of Porteous with his breezily cheerful manner was like a tonic. "What do you know?"

Porteous drew up a chair beside where Wayne sat.

"Hampex has climbed a little, to one seventy-five," he said. "But there she sticks. Evidently the Black-Downey interests haven't got all they want yet, and nobody knows what's up, so the price holds around one seventy-five. Bill Black has gone up to the lake with his gang of Italians. Aside from that, the *status* is practically *quo*."

"What has become of your friend Hallerton?" asked Wayne.

Porteous hesitated before answering, studying Wayne's face.

"Suppose I got to tell you, though Rosalie told me I must not. Rosalie promised Miss Dennison she

wouldn't, but Rosalie and me are two different persons. Hallerton's gone north with Miss Dennison and Nanette Dubois."

Wayne nearly jumped out of his chair. Then he subsided and began to digest the matter, staring out of the window toward where the Marquette sparkled in the sun. Finally his face became animated as he asked:

"How long have I been cooped up here?"

"Pretty near five weeks," answered Porteous.

"All right," said Wayne. "That's plenty long enough. I'm going to swing into action."

He leaned toward Porteous, his jaws biting down hard on every word as he added:

"Here's what I want you to do; find Rouge Dubois and tell him to get ready to start with me for Big Loon Lake tomorrow morning."

"But, sweetly suffering angels, man, you can't go; you're only just out of a sick bed," protested Porteous.

"Can't!" stormed Wayne. "I've got to, that's all there is about that. Bill Black's option on Miss Dennison's claim to the Chovard tract expires in less than three weeks, as I figure it. He'll try, because he thinks, or pretends to, that her price is high, to get an extension. I've got to find out precisely what's in the Chovard tract before that option ex-

pires. The blamed kid is a babe in arms compared to Bill Black when it comes to a business deal, and there's no line on this Hallerton. He may be working with Black for all we know; he may be advising her to sell right now. I've got to prospect the Chovard tract and I've got to see Miss Dennison and talk things over with her."

Wayne's set face was not that of a sick man now, but the face of a grim-jawed go-getter, and Porteous realized how useless would be argument.

"All right, old man," he said. "I'll do my part, but you're taking a tremendous risk. Those lungs of yours haven't fully cleared yet and they may cave; if they do, good-night!"

"All right. If they do, they do, you won't hear me whimper," said Wayne. "I know the chances I'm taking, but I've got to take them to keep faith with myself. I agreed to look out for the kid: I'm going to. I don't put any trust in Hallerton; he has less spine than a jelly fish."

Tom Porteous had scarcely left the room when Rosalie Thebault entered, her features flushed, her jaw set.

"By gar, m'sieu, you think I nurse you back when Doc Poitras say you die sure, and then let that rascal Rouge Dubois take you up Big Loon Lake

before you half well? Me, I think Rouge Dubois he have something coming for him."

Rosalie swung a huge arm through the air and her jaws clicked, but Wayne only smiled.

"Can't help it, old dear," he answered. "This is one time when I've got to go against everybody's orders. Just now, you're a lot stronger than I am, but you'd have to kill me to keep me here."

Rosalie stormed and she threatened dire and terrible things she would do to Rouge Dubois if he even considered taking Wayne to Big Loon Lake. But Wayne only grinned and told her that he was the original immovable object, which was entirely over Rosalie's head, but did serve to convince her, when she saw the look in his eyes as he said it, that she was only butting her head against a stone wall.

"Very well, m'sieu," she declared, calming down. "Then I go too, and ten million Rouge Dubois' shall not stop me."

"All right," said Wayne. "If you can stand it I can; but who'll look out for Frosty Blink?"

"M'sieu Frosty Blink start for Quebec on some business or rudder tomorrow," she said.

Rosalie left the room with a gesture, shortly thereafter to return with Rouge Dubois and a sheepish look on her good-natured features.

"I go," she said. "But Rouge, he say we have

get married first or folks talk; what you think about that, m'sieu?"

Rouge Dubois, behind Rosalie's back, cast a huge wink in Wayne's direction.

"Sure," Wayne agreed. "Wouldn't be possible otherwise. I meant to have told you that before."

"Very good," said Rosalie. "I be ready at eight o'clock, and we got have shindig, or she don't hold; Rouge, you hear?"

Rouge Dubois nodded. Rosalie planted a resounding kiss on his mouth and then she hurried from the room laughing uproariously.

At the trading posts of the far north marriages are never a matter of much church formality. There men of the cloth can come but seldom, can stop but a few days before they must mush on or paddle on to other waiting communities; hence there is no opportunity for the publishing of the banns. A marriage service by the curé or parson, if one is on hand; if not a civil ceremony by the factor, to be confirmed later by the church, a jubilation, or shindig, as it is called, and that is all there is to it; life with the newly married couple settles down again to its regular routine.

The moment Rosalie Thebault was safely out of the room, Rouge Dubois turned to Wayne.

"M'sieu," he said, his face all excitement, "I been

try for more than week to see you, but that Rosalie, she say I have keep out. Me, I theenk I bust weeth my news eef I have hold her much longer."

Wayne's features indicated only puzzled interest. Very evidently Rouge Dubois was with difficulty holding in a big secret.

"I don't know; what do I think?"

Rouge Dubois tiptoed to the door and made sure that no one was listening, then he came back, drew a small moose-hide sack from the pocket of his mackinaw and handed it to Wayne.

"Look in her."

Wayne untied the string, opened the sack and poured some of the contents into his hand, Rouge Dubois watching him with glistening eyes.

"Well, m'sieu?"

"Looks to me like gold; where did it come from?"

"Gol'!" exploded Rouge Dubois in a roar. "Sure she gol'. And that, m'sieu, ees the copper what Beel Black fin' at Beeg Loon Lake. Me, I theenk that lan' up there, she rotten with gol', else why Beel Black he's so 'fraid anybody excep' hees own men step foot on her, eh what, m'sieu?"

Wayne could only stare at the dull yellow grains in his hand, staggered with thoughts of the enormous possibilities that seemed to open before his eyes if there really was gold up there.

CHAPTER XIX

NORTH AGAIN

FINALLY, Wayne lifted his gaze to Rouge Dubois' face.

"How did you come by this gold?"

Rouge Dubois took the chair that Tom Porteous had vacated and lowered his voice.

"Me, I been trap and feesh aroun' that Beeg Loon Lake for ten-twendy-thirdy-years. Las' spring I fin' place where somebody she deeg trench in groun' feefty-seexty-seventy feet long, seex feet deep.

"I say to maself: theese theeng she queer; what for any mans be so beeg fool as deeg trench like that way up here? An' by gar, she carry way all the dirt! That make her still more queer. Jus' then five-seex-seven Beel Black's men she come along and tell me get off lan' and if she ever catch me on her again he break ma head.

"Wall, I go—I can't leek five-seex-seven mens at same tam—and when she all carry gun. But, m'sieu, you bet me I do one beeg theenks that night before I go asleep. An' by gar, I get idea!

"De nex' night I go for that trench for get some that dirt; but Beel Black's men, she catch me and we have beeg fight before I break away. I have bust leg and pretty near bust head, but I also have some that dirt. I sen' her down Quebec for get assay, see wat's in heem.

"M'sieu, she ees gol'. I jus' fin' out day before I start up here."

"But, look here, Dubois," said Wayne. "Is this strike on Black's land or on the Chovard tract?"

Dubois threw up both hands. "Me, I don' know. I theenk mabbe she between the two."

Wayne shook his head. "Can't be between the two: it's either on one or both, more likely both. How much does Bill Black know of this?"

"He don' *know* anything," answered Dubois. "But he suspec' I know too much, so he chase me up, but I keep out hees way."

"All right; so far as good," said Wayne. "Now I've got to prospect the Chovard tract and do it in a devil of a hurry; get up there and find out what I want to know before Bill Black's two hundred thousand dollar option he got from Miss Dennison expires. I came prepared to prospect for copper and I don't know a blamed thing about how to look for gold; but I reckon the post factor will put me next.

Can you be ready to start tomorrow morning, Rouge?"

Dubois flipped a huge thumb. "Me, I be ready for start in ten minutes, excep' for that Rosalie Thebault. Rosalie say she got to have shindig after we marry, an' m'sieu, you know that Rosalie! Wall, I bet me what she want she get or somebody get break head."

Wayne smiled. "Rouge, it's easily seen you're no lion with the ladies. Rosalie's as mild as milk when you handle her right. She's got you buffaloed."

Dubois shook a dubious head as he left the room. "Mabbe, m'sieu, you fin' out few things 'bout that Rosalie Thebault, some tam; Rosalie, she wan fine womans—but, by damn, she got keek with her fist what feel like some hind leg of mule."

At daylight the following morning Wayne was again on the river in a big canoe. Rouge Dubois sat in the stern, paddling, Rosalie in the bow, and Wayne amidships, comfortably resting on several bags of their camp truck. Before the start, when he began to walk about, he had been a little frightened, he felt so weak, afraid he was not going to be able to stand the long journey. But, after an hour's travel on the river, strength began slowly to return to his limbs.

The crystal clear air, first breath of the soon

coming winter, mild now, but an air that would be deathly cold later; the colorful panorama of fall that encompassed them on both sides, the glory of burning reds, of golden yellow, of softening greens and the intensely blue sky above, all these did their part in putting new vigor into his blood after a trying siege of illness.

And now Wayne was savoring life as never before. It seemed to him as if he could never tire of looking. The rolling river, at one moment a flood of pearls, now amethysts, now flecked with snow white foam and spindrift that was like fairy tracery when it was not the thundering aftermath of the many boiling rapids through which they raced in breakneck speed and in constant danger of their lives.

Before leaving Fort Carillon, Wayne saw Frosty Blink off on his start for Quebec, secured a gold testing outfit from the post factor, had a talk with Tom Porteous, and told him of Rouge Dubois' discovery. Porteous had been like a ten-year-old boy when the first spring circus comes to his town.

"Sweet cement!" he exclaimed. "I was sure we must have a shark on the line, but here it turns out to be a whale. Say, when I slip that little bit of info' down to New York! Zippo! If hell don't

pop wide open on the Curb market I'm a mummy—been dead three thousand years and don't know it."

"Wait, wait, lad," protested Wayne. "You can't send any news to New York yet. As a matter of fact, we haven't got anything but surmises. Rouge Dubois appears with a bag of dust, but that isn't a gold mine. There may not be another penny's worth of the metal there. Rouge may have got it all; the spot may have been salted for this very purpose."

"Forget it," said Porteous. "There's many a runaway market been made on one tenth the gold Rouge Dubois has found. I'm going to wireless New York this morning, but your conscience needn't trouble you any, Yeatman; I'll only send the truth; swear on my honor I won't stretch it a hundredth of an inch. Don't need to; 's enough!"

"But won't that start a stampede up here?" protested Wayne.

"What of it?" answered Porteous. "Let 'em come; the more the merrier. But there isn't much chance until spring. We are within a month of the freeze-up now, less, if a blizzard should happen along. Matter of fact, if you want to get out before you get froze in, you'll have to hurry yourself. You've only got just about time to prospect your

claim and hike out again in a hurry, and that barring no delays."

"Two weeks is all I want," answered Wayne with grim face, "and, by the mother that bore me, I want those more than you can have any idea of, lad."

Porteous grasped Wayne's hand. "Maybe I got some idea, Yeatman," he said, and the two parted.

Fortunately for Wayne, he and Rouge Dubois had several days of steady traveling on the river before they took to the trail. This gave him an opportunity to gather his strength, to get his muscles hardened for what was coming. When they did start on the trail, packing their camp things and leaving the canoe behind, he felt better than he had ever felt before in his life. His sense of well-being was tremendous; his skin glowed with ruddy health; his eyes sparkled, he wanted continually to run instead of walk, and he ate like a famished timber wolf. The simplest food had never tasted so delicious before; the mere joy of conscious existence was a delight.

Soon after leaving the Marquette, they came to acres and acres of land, as far as the eyes could see, that had been devastated by a fire. Only the tall trunks of the trees remained, thousands of them, charred spires, lifting gaunt arms on high as if

crying out to God for the injury that had been done. Many had been so badly burned that the first heavy wind might send them crashing to earth; others might continue to stand for years.

By evening of their fourth day of foot travel, they reached the southern limits of the Chovard tract and had, as yet, met not a living soul.

A thousand acres is, comparatively speaking, not a huge parcel of the earth, but it looms big. Several years before, the Chovard tract, a combination of several smaller claims, had been surveyed and staked out at twenty-rod intervals with white circled markers. But many of these stakes had rotted and fallen, while others had been pulled up by thoughtless Indians, for no decent white person will ever meddle with a surveyor's mark. Enough remained, however, to indicate a general idea of the boundaries.

Roughly, the Chovard tract was in the shape of a gigantic triangle cut out of the various claims the Black-Downey interests had acquired, like a slice of pie. It was several miles wide at the base and came to a blunt point at Big Loon Lake. Wayne and his party came upon the land at the base of the triangle and here they decided to make camp and establish their headquarters, as the spot was only a short distance from where Rouge Dubois had dis-

covered the trench with its gold-bearing earth, and here there was water.

"We'll take a look around soon," said Wayne as he and Dubois sat smoking after their evening meal. "Black's men won't be expecting us—at least I don't think they will—and I want to see that trench before they know we are here. About midnight, we'll start out, if you reckon it's safe to leave Rosalie alone."

Rouge Dubois chuckled. "M'sieu, I theenk mabbe Rosalie, she safer than you and me. I bet me nobody trouble Rosalie eef they know who she ees."

Came midnight and Wayne and Rouge Dubois left the camp. It was still and clear, just enough light to enable them to see their way. After an hour's tramping, they emerged from a patch of wood at the spot where Dubois claimed to have discovered the trench.

"By gar! By gar!" he exclaimed as he stared about him. "Theese sure ees place, but where ees trench?"

There was not the slightest sign of anything resembling a trench anywhere in the vicinity.

CHAPTER XX

THE CHOVARD TRACT

A HINT of treachery began slowly to form in Wayne's brain. So far, he had trusted Rouge Dubois implicitly, but things were beginning to look a little strange. He poked about with the toe of his boot among the dead leaves and litter at the spot where Dubois said the trench had been. If a six-foot trench had ever cut the earth at that spot its concealing had been most artfully accomplished. Beneath the leaves was only dead vegetable matter that had, apparently, been lying there undisturbed for uncounted centuries.

"Look again, Rouge; are you certain this is the place?" asked Wayne. It was difficult for him to abandon all faith in this big, good-natured French-Canadian guide.

"Sure?" exclaimed Dubois earnestly. "M'sieu, I am so sure I bet my life on her. Me, I travel theese country seence I been keed. Anybody tell you they lose Rouge Dubois anywhere north of Quebec, you tell heem hees liar from hees birth and don' know the truth when he see her."

"All right, Rouge," said Wayne. "I'm going to believe you. Let's see if we can discover any of my boundary stakes."

They cruised the spot in every direction for two hours, hunting for boundary markers, and were just about to abandon the search when they came upon the first one, a cedar post bearing a white circle, an arrow pointing north and the letter C. Following the direction indicated by the arrow, they discovered half a dozen more stakes. Examining the last one, Wayne suddenly threw up his head and his jaws clicked.

"Come here, Rouge," he called, striking a match. "Hasn't that post been recently hit on the top with a hammer or a sledge? See where the cross-cut and partly decayed grain has been crushed down as if by a blow?"

Dubois examined the post in the light of the match. "M'sieu, you sure right!" he exclaimed. Then, as he looked at the earth at the butt: "An' see, m'sieu, the dead leaves here; she been push into the groun'. Theese stake, she been drove in here only short time ago, seence the rain."

Wayne straightened up. "Somebody has been altering these boundary marks!" he exclaimed. "Changing them east of where you say that trench was dug. Now, according to the stakes, that spot

is on what is the Black-Downey land: before it was on mine—or Miss Dennison's. I begin to smell a rat. Let's have a look at the other stakes."

Every stake they examined bore faint traces of recent hammer marks. Wayne turned to Dubois.

"Of course," he said, "changing these stakes couldn't really do anybody any good if the trouble was taken to re-survey, for the stakes would have to agree with the original survey measurements as they are set down in the deed, or the surveyor would know instantly that the markers had been changed and just how far. I expect whoever moved these—and I think I see the fine Italian handiwork of Bill Black—was taking a chance that his mischief would not be discovered and the land never re-surveyed."

"Sure, m'sieu, that's right; but what you goin' do about her?"

Wayne pondered the matter a moment. Then:

"Nothing, I guess, now; later, we'll see. Tomorrow I'll start prospecting over on my side of the stakes."

At daylight on the following morning, Wayne was out with his pick, his shovel and the mercury testing outfit he had obtained from the post factor.

The process was crude but effective, and, pressed for time as they were, the only one they could use.

The dirt or ore, if it was not already broken up into fine particles, had first to be crushed between stones. Then it was placed in a pan with water and quicksilver poured over it. As soon as the quicksilver had a chance to absorb any gold that might be present, it was washed of dirt by panning, and any water left evaporated. The quicksilver was next poured into a buckskin bag and pressed until it had all passed out through the pores, leaving the gold behind—if there was any.

Day after day, Wayne and Rouge Dubois put in twenty hours out of the twenty-four collecting samples and going through this tiresome process again and again; always without results. Copper they came across often in the outcrop; they saw it everywhere, but no trace of gold.

"Reckon we've been stung; that spot where you found the gold must have been salted, Rouge," said Wayne one evening as he unkinked his aching back and looked up from examining a recently squeezed buckskin bag that was empty of everything but air. As he saw the time lengthening, he had worked without rest and with feverish anxiety, and the strain and loss of sleep was beginning to tell on him.

Rosalie Dubois reached out her hand and patted him on the shoulder.

"M'sieu," she said, "you stick her out. I theenk you fin' something soon."

"Sure," agreed Wayne. "We find a lot of somethings already, but they weren't any of them gold."

"You stick," insisted Rosalie. "Me, las' night I have dream. I see you run toward me weeth your han' full money. By gar, eet look like million dollars. You han' me lot theese money—and then I wake up."

"Dreams always go by contraries," said Wayne.

Rosalie shook her head. "No, m'sieu, not weeth me. My dream, a lot of her come true. You see."

Only once during all the time that they had been in camp had they heard anything from Bill Black or his men. That news had come through a half breed named Long Bear with whom Rouge Dubois was acquainted, and who had come upon them just as they were starting out on their first prospecting trip.

Accompanied by nine dogs, Long Bear was going to Fort Carillon to bring back a load of supplies for the winter trapping season. At the fort, he would buy a sledge and mush north again with his load of freight as soon as the first snow fell.

From this half breed they learned that Black's Italians were constructing a huge camp up near the lake and that Nanette Dubois, Cecile Dennison and

Dan Hallerton had pitched their tents on the opposite side.

This news, coupled with the delay in finding any trace of gold on his land, made Wayne uneasy. Since Cecile was so near Black, it was probable that there had been communication between them and that Black was only waiting the right moment to take up or get an extension of his option on the Chovard tract.

"If we don't find any trace of gold tomorrow," said Wayne, after many days' prospecting, "I'm going north to Nanette's camp. I've got to have a talk with Miss Dennison. She must know about this gold discovery of yours, Rouge."

"All right," agreed Dubois. "Wan theeng, she same as another to me."

The next day Wayne and Rouge Dubois were again out at the first streak of dawn.

"Let's try a new spot," said Wayne as they were starting. "Let's work east—we've been working north most of the time so far."

Rouge agreeing, they started east and had been traveling for almost an hour when Dubois suddenly paused with eyes staring ahead of him.

"By gar, m'sieu, look!" he cried.

Straight ahead of them was a long trench dug in the earth exactly as Dubois had described.

"But this isn't the place it ought to be in," said Wayne. "What can it mean?"

Rouge Dubois began prodding his head with one finger. "By gar, m'sieu, I don't understan' her. Mabbe I been mistake before and theese, she ees right place. She sure look like same trench, but theese ees on Chovar' trac'."

"Well, anyway, I'm going to test some of the dirt."

Wayne climbed down into the trench.

"But eef theese is right place, we know she have gol' in her," protested Dubois. "What's use wasting time testing her?"

"We don't *know* anything," answered Wayne. "That dirt you took away may have been salted; I'm going to find out for sure. Keep an eye out above there for any of Black's men. This thing may be a trap for us, as it was a trap before for you."

Five times Wayne tested ore from that trench and found not even a trace of gold.

"Worth five hundred to the ton!" he commented dispiritedly, as he made the last test. "Anybody that paid five cents a ton for this cursed stuff would be badly swindled. Either you had the right spot before and this is the wrong one and a new trench, or this is the original one and it was salted."

Dubois was puzzled. "Mabbe I been fool twice," he said. "But eef so, she firs' tam eet happen."

"Let's strike west in the direction this trench heads," said Wayne. "I'll try once more, then I'm going to quit—I've got enough." He felt utterly discouraged.

They walked west a way; Wayne struck in with his pick and then felt suddenly faint as he stared with bulging eyes at the earth he had turned up.

No call for the mercury test here. The whole patch of ground was aglow with tiny particles that shone in the sun like so many stars.

"Gol'!" cried Rouge Dubois. "M'sieu, I theenk she run ten, fifteen thousan' dollar to the ton."

"Good God!" was all Wayne could say.

His hands trembling, all excitement, he followed the lead for fifty feet and found no decrease in the richness of the dirt he uncovered. Then he straightened up.

"'S enough," he said. "This, beyond doubt, is on the Chovard tract. Now we're going up to Miss Dennison's camp as quick as God and our feet will let us."

Rouge Dubois looked somewhat doubtful. "You sure, m'sieu, she's not salt?" he asked. "Me, I theenk strange nobody fin' her before—when she so theek."

"Nothing strange about it," Wayne answered. "The whole history of mining is thickly sprinkled with records of prospectors who have given up in disgust, or sold out for a few dollars, when one more blow of the pick would have made them millionaires. Later, somebody else came along, delivered that blow and collected the millions. Black started his trench in the wrong spot; all he found, if he really found anything, was washings. We've struck the mother lode."

Painstakingly, they obliterated all trace of their digging and hurried back toward their own camp. Rosalie saw them coming and gathered what was in the wind before either Wayne or Rouge Dubois spoke.

"M'sieu, you fin' her?" she cried joyfully.

"Sure did," answered Wayne, laughing like a boy just released from school. "A thousand times richer than I expected. Hurry on with that dinner and then we'll start north."

He turned to Rouge and added, "You and Rosalie are partners on this—that is, if my claim proves to be the one that holds."

For a moment Dubois stared; then he thrust out his hand with a grin.

"M'sieu, you sure wan white man," he said. "But

what you mean 'bout eef your claim she prove good?"

Wayne explained to him regarding Cecile Dennison's belief that it was she and her aunt, Jack Merode's wife, who really owned the Chovard tract. At the mention of Jack Merode's name a look of sudden consternation overspread the smiling features of Rouge Dubois.

"By gar! By gar!" he exclaimed with sagging jaws as Wayne finished. "I remember that beeg card game between your grand'fadder and Square-deal Jack Merode. Me, I was fourt' man at table."

Wayne suddenly dropped the things he had been packing and whirled toward Rouge Dubois.

"What!" he bellowed with narrowing eyes as he grasped Dubois by both shoulders. "If you were there do you know this: was a deed to the Chovard tract on the table at any time?"

Rouge Dubois tried to avoid Wayne's burning eyes but found he could not; they held him, made him blurt out the truth.

"M'sieu, I'm whole lot sorry," he said finally. "But your gran'fadder, he lose Chovar' trac' that night to Square-deal Jack Merode; he lose everything he got, even coat on heese back. Me, I forgot all 'bout her before. Now I remember."

Wayne slumped down to a seat on a log beside

the fire, feeling suddenly as if every particle of strength in him had oozed out at his finger tips. The whole face of his world had been shattered with one sentence. It was not he, but Cecile Dennison, who really owned the Chovard tract, and now, if he had ever dreamed of winning her, that dream was gone, for the ownership of the Chovard tract would make her so rich that she would be forever beyond his reach—if she had not allowed Bill Black to take up his option.

CHAPTER XXI

THE STORM

For one thought-crowded instant, Wayne Yeatman permitted himself to hope that Cecile Dennison might have done just that thing, accepted Bill Black's offer of $200,000 for her claim to the Chovard tract; for surely Black, if he really had any idea how much gold there was there, would never permit a chance to acquire the land so cheaply to slip through his fingers, even if he had to bid many times that sum.

Then Wayne cast that wish wholly out of his mind as unworthy, and his huge shoulders straightened.

"Well, Rouge," he said. "Ten minutes ago we were prospective millionaires, or thought we were; now we're as poor as ever."

Dubois flipped an indifferent finger. "M'sieu, mabbe she better some tam for be poor than reech," he declared philosophically. "Me, I been happy all ma life so far, more happy than any reech man I ever see. Mabbe I struggle along for another few

year without million dollar. What you goin' do nex', m'sieu?"

"Hurry to Nanette's camp, as I told you before," answered Wayne. "I still intend to play the game square, clear to the finish; couldn't ever again look at my own reflection in a mirror if I didn't, and Miss Dennison must know about this gold strike on her Chovard tract."

"All right, m'sieu," agreed Dubois. "Rosalie, you get move on and we be ready for start in mos' no time."

Half an hour later they were again on the trail, planning to cover as much ground as possible in the few hours that remained to them before nightfall. The temperature had dropped many degrees, and there were signs in the air that filled Rouge Dubois with uneasiness.

"I theenk mabbe we get blizzard pretty soon," he said, cocking a wise eye skyward. "Eef she catch us before we reach Nanette's camp, we sure have some hard travel weethout snowshoe or dog. Me, I don' expec' snow for month yet, or I breeng along snowshoe."

Before another hour the snow had begun to fall, slowly at first, then thickening up rapidly until they could see scarcely twenty feet ahead of them. A terrific wind blew directly in their faces and they

were finally obliged to make camp. This was done more on Rosalie's account than on that of either of the two men. Rosalie was not yet toughened to the trail and her weight made travel in the snow doubly hard for her.

They managed to erect the tent, build a fire and cook supper, and all turned in to rest up for the morrow.

One factor of the storm was providential; it would completely obliterate for all winter every trace of their having unearthed gold on the Chovard tract, even though their own efforts at concealment did not prove effectual.

Came morning: it was still snowing, the wind blowing a gale and Rosalie was so thoroughly fatigued that travel for her was out of the question. On her own initiative, and knowing how anxious Wayne was to reach the lake, she proposed that Rouge and he leave her and go on.

"You can make her in one day," insisted Rosalie. "And me, I'll be all right here in camp until the snow she stop."

Wayne and Rouge Dubois started, Dubois in the lead breaking the trail; Wayne, his head lowered to shelter his face from the sleet, watching Rouge's footsteps, and following close behind. A half hour of bucking the storm, however, brought realization

that he could no longer keep on. There had come a terrific pain in his chest, he was forced to struggle and gasp for every breath and his legs were trembling with weakness.

In good weather Wayne had stood the journey splendidly, but after his recent siege of double pneumonia, the storm and the low temperature had hit him in his only weak spot, his lungs. He fought against it with all the grit that was in him, but it was a losing battle from the first.

Finally, he stumbled, fell, and was unable to rise again.

Rouge Dubois looked back and sensed the situation immediately. Lifting Wayne in his arms, he started back toward the camp they had left but a short time before.

"M'sieu, I theenk you look pretty white around the gill when you leave theese morning," said Rosalie as she made Wayne comfortable in a sleeping bag inside the tent and began to brew him a cup of coffee. "But me, I know how anxious you were for get to Nanette's camp, so I don' say anything."

Wayne drank the coffee and its grateful warmth made him feel better for the moment, though his hand was so weak he could not hold the cup to his lips and Rosalie was obliged to hold it for him.

"Too blamed bad I had to flop," he said. "Afraid this will lose the kid her land."

Then, after a moment: "Wish I had a calendar, but I haven't. According to my reckoning, Black's option must be due to expire in a day or so. Still, I may be away off; so much been happening I've rather lost track of time."

For days the storm continued to rage about their tent and they remained in camp, Wayne, unable to do anything save rest in his sleeping bag and fret at the tough luck that had incapacitated him for travel when travel was the one thing on earth he most wished to do.

Came the fifth morning and Wayne was awakened by the yapping and whining of sledge dogs. He opened his eyes to a realization that the sun was shining in at the raised tent flap and that Rouge Dubois, outside the tent, was talking with some one who was not Rosalie. A second look and he saw that it was Long Bear, the big half breed they had met on his way to Fort Carillon soon after first making camp on the Chovard tract.

Rouge Dubois, glancing inside the tent, and observing that Wayne was awake, came hurrying to his side, a letter in his hand.

"Here, m'sieu," he cried, "ees letter theese Long Bear breeng you. She from Tom Porteous; he

geeve Long Bear fifty dollar eef he make double time and get her to you."

Wayne took the envelope and tore it open with trembling fingers. "Must be something mighty important if Porteous was willing to pay fifty dollars to get it delivered," he thought. It was. It said:

> "Hell broke loose yesterday on the N. Y. Curb Market the moment my tip about a gold strike at Big Loon Lake got circulated. Hampex shot to ten, then to forty dollars in half as many minutes. The Black-Downey brokers are chasing each other around in circles denying everything, dumping stock on the market in bales, trying to hold down the price. They say any report of gold there is pure fake, only copper and no way yet to freight it out. In spite of this, Hampex holds obstinately at thirty-four. My brokers are urging me to sell, but it's the limit or bust with me. You too, I hope. Send me news the moment you get any.
>
> "Tom Porteous."

Wayne read Porteous' letter and then, looking out the tent flap, had an inspiration.

"Rouge," he said, "I want to get to Loon Lake as soon as possible. I also want to get a letter back to Tom Porteous. Do you suppose you could persuade Long Bear to leave his freight here and let you have his dogs to take me on to Big Loon Lake while he hurries back afoot to Fort Carillon with a message for Porteous?"

Dubois grinned. "Sure, m'sieu, he do her or I break hees head. You see."

"All right," said Wayne. "Start the machinery. I'll pay him any price he asks for his dog team. There's about one chance in a thousand that Bill Black may not have taken up his option yet, and I want that thousandth chance. With all there is at stake, I'm sure Miss Dennison won't question my spending her money in this way."

Long Bear came into the tent in response to Dubois' call and Rouge put the proposition before him. At first he demurred, but when Wayne told him that he would deposit the cost of the entire load of freight with Rosalie and that, if any part of it was lost, she would reimburse him, Long Bear agreed to rent his dog team to Wayne. Rosalie was to remain in the camp until Rouge returned for her, or, if he did not come back within a reasonable time, she would start for Fort Carillon alone.

Few preparations were necessary; they would travel as light as possible, leaving most of the duffle with Rosalie, and with her they had also to leave their only firearm, Rouge Dubois' rifle, as Wayne had long ago used up all the ammunition Cecile Dennison had given him for the automatic.

"Ought to have bought more at the fort," he said as they were starting. "But didn't think of it."

"Never min'," said Rouge. "We get along. Sometam you don' get in trouble eef you don' have no gun."

Wayne, wrapped snugly in wolf robes, rode on the komatic. Dubois, one hand on the gee-pole, the other holding the long whip he was constantly cracking over the backs of the dogs, sometimes rode standing, and at others ran alongside on the snowshoes he had bought from Long Bear.

The season's first snow, falling damp, had packed solidly and travel was easy. The dogs, lean, splendidly muscled huskies, and in prime condition, always hungry, always expecting a liberal meal at the next halt, made good time; though double their speed could scarcely have satisfied Wayne, for, deep in his heart lingered the hope that he had made an error in reckoning the time and that Black had not yet taken up his option on the Chovard tract.

The trees, their limbs loaded with frost that glittered like diamonds in the sunlight, made the journey a continual passage through a fairy world of beauty; yet Wayne saw almost nothing of this; his mind was always miles ahead, up at Big Loon Lake, going over and over again the talk he would have with Cecile Dennison. To him she was no longer "the kid," and he would not have dared call

her that; she was the fabulously rich Miss Dennison now.

A hundred times he wondered how she would react to the information of vast import he was bringing her. Especially did he wonder how she would react if she had already parted with the Chovard tract, worth at the most conservative estimate many million dollars, for a paltry fraction of its actual value; and this after he had warned her again and again that she must not sell to Black if it could be avoided. As Wayne saw it, Black had acquired his option by sharp dealing, taking advantage of her business inexperience and lack of knowledge regarding the Chovard tract, and it would be doing nothing unfair to keep out of his way until that option expired. Yet he much doubted if she would know enough to do this.

Would she be sorry or glad if she had sold the land, he wondered, and would she have the grace to acknowledge that things might have been different had she followed his counsel? In all his dreams it was she was the star, yet always a star, a bright and glittering thing of wondrous beauty far beyond his reach.

Came the final leg of their journey that had to be made through deep woods, for the fire that had devastated so much of the forestation to the south

had not penetrated up as far as this. Then, at last, they emerged from the wood and their eyes were greeted with the intensely blue waters of the lake, only partially frozen over.

Big Loon Lake! Wayne's every heartbeat quickened, but here, he was destined to meet his greatest disappointment. At the spot where Long Bear had told them Nanette Dubois would be found camped there was now no sign of human habitation; only traces of one that had been broken many hours before and a trail leading south. On the other side of the lake they could see Black's busy camp.

Wayne's hopes sank. Cecile Dennison was returning to Fort Carillon: there could be little doubt of that now, and before leaving she had probably sold out to Bill Black; Black would never have permitted her to leave otherwise. Wayne felt depressed, tremendously disappointed; even the magic beauty of the lake, a spot of wondrous charm, flanked on two sides by God's almighty towering mountains, now covered with snow, could not raise his spirits.

He was staring ahead, considering what it were best to do when he heard some one shout a stentorian hello to Dubois and saw a man carrying a string of fish approaching on snowshoes from the direction of Black's camp. As the man came nearer, Wayne recognized him. It was Etienne Paravent,

the young French-Canadian guide he had rescued when Black's Italians had him trussed up by his wrists.

Paravent spoke a moment in French with Dubois, then he turned to Wayne, his eyes shining.

"By gar, M'sieu Yeatman, I'm glad for see you," he said, offering his hand. "My brudder, Jacques, he tell me how you get me out that feex weeth them damn wop. Me, I don' know much anything at time, but you bet me I got big thanks for what you do for me, jus' the same."

"That's all right, boy," answered Wayne dispiritedly. "Mighty glad I was able to help. Know anything about when Nanette Dubois and her party quit their camp here?"

Etienne chuckled. "Sure, m'sieu, they leeve here las' night, middle of night, start for Fort Carillon. That ma'amselle weeth Nanette, she geeve Beel Black option on Chovar' trac' some tam ago; but I theenk she don' wan' sell, so she get out heese way. Anyway, she leeve here in middle the night. When Beel Black, he fin' her out he so mad he mos' jump up in air and bus'. So soon as he can, he get dog team and follows; he say he gone get that Chovar' trac' or keel somebody. Me, I don' theenk he ever catch that Nanette Dubois unless her dog team they

all break his leg. Nanette, she wan devil for drive dog and she got fine team she hire from Indian name Jim Glass. Both Nanette and Beel Black, they took Little Babo' trail, or mabbe, m'sieu, you meet them."

"Well, she did have a little business sense," Wayne reflected. Then: "But why didn't they take the river; it's not frozen over yet?"

Etienne laughed. "Mabbe, m'sieu, you never try for travel on river against current at deese season of year? Wall, don' try her eef you expec' get anywhere queek."

Wayne's spirits had begun to revive at the first mention of Etienne's news. So far, the Chovard tract was safe, but how safe? Cecile Dennison was hurrying toward Fort Carillon to avoid selling the land; of that much he was sure. But, trailing her, only a few hours behind, was Bill Black, trying to reach her before the option expired. If he caught up with her she would certainly keep her word and sell to him; she was that sort.

"What's become of Dan Hallerton?" asked Wayne.

"Oh, heem? He and theese young woman have beeg disagree over something; me, I don' know what," answered Etienne. "He's been stop at Beel

Black's camp ever seence few days after ma-amselle, she reach here weeth Nanette."

"That settles that, then," declared Wayne with sudden determination. "I'm going to mush the Little Babos trail myself."

He turned to Rouge Dubois and repeated his determination. The habitant looked dubious.

"M'sieu, I theenk 'nother blizzard she come along pretty soon, mighty queek," he said, glancing skyward.

"Don't give two continental damns if there are a dozen blizzards coming," Wayne snapped. "Rouge, you're going to drive me back to Fort Carillon over the Little Babos trail; get that? You can do it cheerfully and I'll pay you two hundred dollars—double the sum if you catch up with Bill Black or with Nanette Dubois before Black does. Or you can refuse and fight it out with me here and now."

Strength had returned to Wayne's limbs. He felt able to cope with anything. His eyes between narrowed lids gleamed like burning rubies and there was grim determination in his set jaw as he faced the habitant.

Rouge Dubois only grinned. The big giant knew that Wayne would stand little chance in a rough and tumble fight against his own steel muscles, yet he admired Wayne's courage.

"M'sieu, I don' take your money, and I don' fight weeth you, but I catch Beel Black or I keel deese dog. When you wan' start, m'sieu?"

"Now, as soon as you can turn the sledge around," answered Wayne.

CHAPTER XXII

AGAINST TIME

For half a day, Wayne Yeatman and Rouge Dubois had been mushing the Little Babos trail toward Fort Carillon, making speed that Wayne had never before imagined could be got from huskies.

The nine dogs of Long Bear's were among the swiftest in the north; in three of the big fall races from Fort Carillon to Arleen they had won over all competitors. They were harnessed two abreast with the leader, Grit, a highly intelligent animal, traveling single. Their ordinary gait was a pace, but they often broke into a run. Before starting, Rouge Dubois had removed the bells usually attached to their harness in order that they might travel more quietly.

A few weeks ago, Wayne would have paid but slight attention to these dogs. Then, an animal was just an animal to him. Now he felt different. In their short association he had become fond of Long Bear's huskies, and they had grown to like him. He could even appreciate Grit, who was often ugly

but would nuzzle against Wayne's leg, begging to have his back rubbed, snapping jealously at any other animal that dared come near.

"The blamed cuss has been suffering for decent treatment," Wayne said as they were halting for the third short breathing spell. "See how he takes to me."

Rouge Dubois grinned. "Sure, m'sieu, an' he take bite out your leg eef he get half chance. Me, I never see dog yet what appreciate kindness excep' so long as he theenk you geeve heem something eat. Grit, he don' been feed seence day behind yesterday —he work best on empty stomach. He theenk mabbe he coax some food out you."

It was a few moments after their third rest spell that they first caught sight of Black and his dog team just topping a rise less than a mile ahead. Black evidently saw them at the same moment, for he stopped, glanced back once, and then lashed his animals over the rise at a terrific speed. He was alone.

"Whip up the dogs and we'll catch him before we've gone another five miles," Wayne shouted, all excitement.

Rouge Dubois looked back and nodded with grim mouth, his whip cracking over the backs of the huskies. Little need, however, to urge them now;

they had both seen and caught the scent of the animals ahead; they knew that a race was on, and a race meant food in abundance to them: they had always been liberally fed at the end of one. They broke into a gait that made the wind whistle past Wayne's ears in a hurricane.

As they topped the rise he looked ahead, but could see nothing, merely a white wall of falling snow. The blizzard Rouge Dubois had predicted was coming at last. At first it brought little discomfort; but, after a few moments riding they came into the burnt over district and then it was another story. The wind blew across the bare country with terrific velocity, all but picking up dogs, man and komatic and hurling them aside. To add to their danger the tall trees that lined the trail, badly burned at the butt, began to crash down in every direction. A dozen times in as many minutes both dogs and komatic escaped descending timber by a mere foot or two.

Rouge Dubois wanted to halt and give the wind a chance to abate.

"M'sieu," he shouted through the roar of the storm, "eef wan of theese trees she fall on dog she keel her sure. I theenk we best wait while here."

"Not a minute! We must take the chances," answered Wayne. "The people ahead of Black have

probably been held up by this and that's our opportunity to catch them."

"But if we lose dog, we don' catch anybody," protested Dubois.

"Mush on and don't be a quitter!" cried Wayne. "This storm is the best thing for us that ever happened."

A few moments later Wayne was not so sure of this, for he saw that Rouge Dubois was becoming puzzled about the trail. The terrific wind had obliterated all visible tracks of the team ahead and now the habitant must depend wholly on Grit, the massive leader, to keep them straight.

Wayne was eagerly peering ahead through the storm, scarcely daring to wink for fear he might miss Black when abruptly he picked something out of the white wall ahead. At first all he saw was a blurred spot weaving from side to side like a swinging pendulum; then the thing began to take on form and outline, and he knew it was Black and his dog team.

Their own dogs had also seen. Filled with a sudden reserve store of energy, uttering sharp whines, they leaped ahead, gaining steadily on the team ahead.

After a moment Black glanced back and Wayne got a clear view of his face framed in the dark fur

of his parka hood. The eyes glittered like those of a mad man; an evil smile wreathed his wet, thin-lipped mouth; it was like a mechanical galvanization on the face of a dead man. In a flash the thought came to Wayne that Bill Black was not only racing on in hope of acquiring the Chovard tract for a fraction of its real value, but that even more evil desires lashed and tortured his spirit. There could be no mistaking that look on his features.

Wayne's anger had approached the boiling point when he saw Black turn, draw an automatic from the breast of his parka and fire at Grit, the lead dog.

For a few steps the brave animal tried to struggle on, then he crumpled up on the trail, blood streaming from his mouth, the other dogs stumbling over him in a wildly tangled, uproarious heap.

Rouge Dubois leaped from the komatic and with many blows and deep curses tried to straighten out the tangle, cutting Grit loose from the rest and finally creating order out of chaos.

They were again forging on, but the delay had given Black a considerable lead and the loss of Grit, the lead dog, was a serious handicap to the team of eight remaining animals. They were still within sight of the sledge ahead, but now unable to make any gain.

Wayne's hopes began to evaporate; their only chance seemed to be that they might tire out Black's team, wear them down; yet they appeared tireless.

Suddenly, as he peered ahead, Wayne saw an enormous tree start to fall directly in Black's path. He watched with staring eyes. Would Black see the falling tree in time to turn aside?

No. In a second the timber had crashed down upon him. From the cloud of snow that rose about the komatic, Wayne saw the dogs struggling in a confused welter to free themselves. The komatic was pinned fast beneath the fallen trunk. And the man who rode was also pinned there.

A few moments later and they had reached the spot. Wayne leaped from the komatic and hurried to ascertain how badly Black had been injured. The man lay quiet, the upper part of the tree across his thighs; only the branches had saved him and the sledge from complete crushing. His face was white and set, the eyes closed. Wayne attempted to lift the tree but could not stir it.

"M'sieu, you too weak," offered Rouge Dubois. "Let me try her."

Dubois crawled beneath the fallen trunk, placed his enormous shoulders against it and tried to straighten up. It seemed as if the cords in his neck

would burst with his straining, but the tree did not stir.

"By damn, she some heavy!" he cried, easing up a moment as he blew out a vast lungful of air. "But I bet me I get her yet."

He drew in his knees closer, rested his elbows on them and then Wayne Yeatman, who, all his life, had been accustomed to prodigies of strength performed by ring gymnasts, witnessed what seemed even to him almost a miracle.

Slowly, the tree was lifted.

"Drive out them dog!" burst explosively from Rouge Dubois' lips, and, in response to Wayne's wild shouts, the huskies drew the komatic free.

Wayne began to examine Black for injuries, but was unable to tell much about it; while he was doing this Black opened his eyes and uttered a groan of pain.

A moment the man stared into Wayne's face, then:

"Guess you win, Yeatman. The breaks have been all your way since the first. Lucky boy. Suppose you're going to mush on now and leave me here to die?"

"I wouldn't quit the worst cur dog I ever knew in that way," snapped Wayne. "I'm going to give you my place on the komatic and carry you with us."

A grim look overspread Black's pale features and his bloodless lips set into a hard line.

"Give you fair warning, Yeatman," he said. "I'm out to buy the Chovard tract, and Miss Dennison is bound to accept my offer if I take it up before the option expires. That's tomorrow at twelve o'clock. I'm willing now to pay her price and she knows it; that's why she tried to keep out of my way."

"All right, Black," said Wayne. "If she wants to sell to you after I tell her what I know, that's her hash—and it's no skin off my nose."

Black looked up with a start. "But where do you come in?" he asked. "Seems to me I recall your telling me that you thought you had a claim to the Chovard tract?"

"But haven't got one any longer," answered Wayne.

"Sold out, eh?" said Black. "Any objections to telling me who to?"

"No, haven't sold out," answered Wayne. "But I know now that grandfather Yeatman lost his ownership of the Chovard tract on the gambling table to Square-deal Jack Merode, uncle of Miss Dennison. I didn't know that when I talked with you before."

"Oh!" said Black, and that was all.

As carefully as if he had been a valued friend

instead of a bitter enemy of them both, Wayne and Rouge Dubois transferred Bill Black to the komatic hired from Long Bear, chose the best of Black's dog team, harnessed these in with their own, let the rest run loose and started again. Black had carried a pair of snowshoes, and these Wayne put on.

"Our only chance of catching Nanette now is that she may have been held up by the storm," said Wayne.

Rouge shook his head. "Nothing hold up my Nanette," he said. "She wan devil: she drive dog through hell fire and brimstone eef she want for get anywhere in hurry."

The storm still raged about them in wild fury, but they pushed on through it, now off the trail as they made detours to avoid fallen trees, now on it again; at times sure they had lost it, but in the end, by ways that seemed miraculous to Wayne but were only a part of the regular day's work to Rouge Dubois and the huskies, finding it again.

Came night and they made camp, cooked a hot meal and almost immediately after fell into deep sleep from sheer exhaustion.

As they were making preparations to start early the next morning, Wayne found Bill Black watching him with curious eyes. There was a drawn look

of pain on the man's features, and Wayne was sure he had not slept at all during the night.

"What's on your mind, Black?" he asked.

Black hesitated a moment before answering, then:

"Of course you know, Yeatman, that if you were to leave me here, my option on the Chovard tract would expire before I could take it up. What's your idea in carrying me along with you when you're following Nanette Dubois and Miss Dennison?"

"Afraid you wouldn't understand my reason if I told you," answered Wayne.

Black considered a moment. "Maybe I might."

Wayne shook his head. "Black, your way and my way of looking at a proposition are as far apart as the poles. When you want anything your mind is set wholly on getting it, and you don't give a continental damn *how* you get it so long as you *do* get it. With me, if I can't play the game absolutely square, I'll be content to go without what I happen to want. You're badly injured. You need skillful treatment; I'm taking you toward it as fast as I can. That we shall catch up with Nanette Dubois and Miss Dennison, perhaps before your option expires, is merely incidental now."

Black said nothing more, but he looked thoughtful.

Freshened by their night's rest, the dogs started off at a rapid pace, maintaining it unceasingly for

two hours, at the end of which time Rouge Dubois was about to halt them for a short breathing spell when there came the sudden spiteful crack of a rifle and the new lead dog dropped in his harness.

Rouge Dubois stared about him, his jaw sagging. He could see no one anywhere; to him the whole thing was mysterious; he was thunderstruck.

Suddenly a woman's voice called in French from behind a huge rock off at one side of the trail:

"Throw Bill Black off your sledge if you want to go on. Quick, now, or I'll pick off your dogs one at a time until I get them all."

Dubois turned to Wayne and translated, adding:

"Shall we throw heem off, m'sieu?"

Wayne had heard the voice, but had not known who it was, merely that it was a woman speaking.

"No, I'll be eternally damned if we will," he cried. "That woman is only trying to scare you. Mush ahead!"

"I don' know about that, m'sieu," said Rouge doubtfully. "Eef Nanette say she keel all dogs, she do her sure."

"Nanette Dubois!" The sudden exclamation burst from between Wayne's lips like the crack of a whip.

If Nanette was concealed behind that rock demanding Bill Black, where was Cecile? What was the meaning of this business, anyway?

With no thought of the risk he was taking, Wayne leaped from the komatic and hurried toward the rock from behind which Nanette had called, determined to solve the mystery at once. Half way there he heard her cry, her voice bitter hard:

"M'sieu, you will stop where you are or I shall shoot."

"Shoot and be damned to you, Nanette Dubois," he answered. "I don't believe you've got the nerve."

The whining ping of a bullet sang past his ear. He moved ahead still faster, heard another report, felt a sudden impact on his left shoulder, stumbled and fell, knowing he had been hit. Before, Nanette, an expert shot, had been playing with him; her last attempt had been strictly business.

CHAPTER XXIII

A BLIND TRAIL

Rouge Dubois was lifting Wayne in his arms, carrying him back to the sledge.

"I 'fraid Nanette, she feex you," he said.

"Hell! This isn't anything," answered Wayne, tearing away his shirt to examine a wound that showed as a deep red furrow in his left shoulder. "Made me faint for a moment; but it's only skin deep."

He picked up a handful of snow, pressed it to his shoulder until it was crimson with blood, threw that away and did the same with fresh handfuls until there was no more bleeding. Then he showed Rouge Dubois how to bind the wound with a length of cloth taken from their duffle.

"Now," he said, grimly, rising to his feet as the job was finished, his jaws clicking on the words, "I'm going back to drag Nanette out from behind that rock; if she expects to stop me this time she's got to shoot to kill."

So far Bill Black had merely been a passive spec-

tator to what had happened, lying back on the komatic and saying nothing. Now he spoke.

"Yeatman, don't be a fool," he said. "I know Nanette Dubois; she'd kill her own father if she once gave her word to do it. Better leave me here and mush on."

Wayne halted and stared at Black in sheer astonishment; was the man delirious? Before, Wayne was certain that few things would have pleased Bill Black more than to see him, Wayne Yeatman, lying dead. Now he appeared more solicitous for Wayne's welfare than for his own.

"Great hokum! Has the man got a white spot in him after all?" Wayne thought.

Evidently Black had, if dependence were to be placed on his next statement.

"I'm about all in, Yeatman," he said. "I think both my hips are crushed; I can feel myself slipping every moment and we're days yet from a doctor, weeks from a hospital. I haven't got the ghost of a chance. If I did happen to pull through, I'd be a helpless cripple and I've no stomach for that; I'd rather die. Just dump me off the sledge and mush on."

Wayne faced Black a moment with narrowed lids, revolving the whole matter in his mind, trying to understand the why of it, yet finding it rather an

endless maze. Black did look to be about all in and if his hips were crushed there wasn't much chance; the only miracle was in his still being alive and conscious, able to endure his sufferings. Yet, somehow, Wayne could not get the idea out of his head that Black still had a card up his sleeve. So far the man had acted no other way than foully treacherous; it was difficult to credit so sudden a reformation. Yet——

"Reckon the only thing I can do is give the damn rascal his chance, bad as he is: I'd never feel satisfied with myself otherwise."

"Black, you may think you're all in," declared Wayne, "but a man never can tell. That thousandth chance comes to us oftener than we realize. I can't dump you off here."

"Let me try talking with Nanette then, find out what's on her mind," pleaded Black with seeming earnestness. "She'll come out from her hiding place at my call if you and her father go beyond earshot."

Wayne studied the proposition a moment; then: "All right, I'll give you one try at it."

Wayne and Rouge Dubois moved fifty yards back on the trail and then heard Black call to Nanette. She emerged from behind the rock, carrying a rifle, and joined him. Her face was pale and drawn. For many moments they engaged in conversation.

Wayne could see, even from his distance, that Black was pleading earnestly with her, but her attitude appeared to be one of cold indifference. She only shook her head to his demands, whatever they were.

Finally Black drew himself to a sitting posture and placed one hand on her arm, still pleading. The touch of his hand appeared to soften her and Black drew Nanette closer. She seemed unable to take her eyes from his; it was as if his gaze fascinated her.

Then, suddenly, before Wayne could fairly gather his senses, Black reached for the dog whip, dragged Nanette down onto the sledge beside him, held her there, and lashed the animals ahead at a furious pace.

"The miserable skunk! Treacherous to the last; he couldn't have been hurt half as bad as I thought," cried Wayne as he started ahead as rapidly as his snowshoes would permit, followed by Rouge Dubois.

As Black and the dog team disappeared around a bend in the trail, Dubois shouted:

"M'sieu, I theenk she better we don' waste our strength. We got no chance for catch them fast dog on foot."

Realizing the utter futility of attempting to overtake a team of prize racing dogs while he traveled on snowshoes, Wayne slowed up.

"Guess we're beat," he said dispiritedly. "How far are we from Fort Carillon?"

This last defeat had disheartened him. As he figured the situation, Cecile Dennison was probably waiting somewhere on the trail ahead and Nanette had remained behind to hold up Black. Now Black would join Cecile, take up his option on the Chovard tract and keep on to the fort, carrying Cecile and Nanette with him.

"I theenk we 'bout two-three day from Fort Carillon, eef nothing she happen to us," answered Dubois.

"We ought to make it," answered Wayne, "but we'll be blamed hungry before we get there. Black's got all our food."

Rouge Dubois grinned. "M'sieu, we get plenty for eat," he said. "Me, I go on trail some tam for four-five-seex week weeth no outfit; but I don' starve. When we camp I show you."

Came night. Rouge Dubois built a fire and left Wayne beside it. An hour later he return with four varying hares, all fat after a summer's plentiful feeding.

"How the devil did you do it?" asked Wayne as he helped Dubois skin them. He knew the habitant carried no firearm.

Dubois held out two thin and powerful hands. "She all I need for get plenty meat," he answered.

"M'sieu, you watch cat when she try for catch bird. She see her; she take one step; she wait; another step, she wait; slow, never shake her body or head. She get close; she jump queek; that bird, he's goner. Me, I go ahead like cat, but I don' jump; I jus' reech out ma hand queek. Rabbit, hees beeg fool; he's never 'fraid; he's only interes', eef you take only wan slow step and wait before you take nex'. Sometam I catch caribou that way, m'sieu. All animal, she got great curious for what she don' understan'. Weeth beeg animal, so long as she don' get scent, an' you keep her interes', you can come close."

After they had broiled and eaten the hares, Dubois made beds of spruce boughs beside the fire and both men were soon sleeping soundly.

When Wayne awoke in the morning it was to discover that the snow had again begun to fall during the night, and that he was already covered with a blanket of fine powdery white.

They started on without breakfast, as Rouge Dubois told Wayne that if they were to subsist on a straight meat diet they must be content with one meal a day; more would be likely to make them ill.

The snow had already obliterated all signs of the sledge traveling ahead, but, as Dubois was familiar with the trail to Fort Carillon, this did not hold up their progress.

"Think we got any chance to catch up with Black?" asked Wayne as he followed the habitant.

"Not unless that Nanette she put heem out business," answered Dubois. "Nanette, shee's wan carkajou for fight an' I been look for signs of scrap all along the trail, but I don' fin' heem yet."

"It's blamed queer," said Wayne, "why Nanette should hold us up there, demand Black, and then ride away with him."

"Me, I don' theenk she so queer," answered Dubois. "When he firs' come up een Canada, Beel Black, he keep company weeth my Nanette. Everybody theenk they gone marry some day: Nanette she theenk so, too. Then Beel Black, wan night at shindig, he tell Nanette he got a wife and three keed back in States and don' have no idea he marry anybody. By damn, Beel Black, he's lucky man he get out Nanette's way pretty queek after he tell her that! She keel heem sure. Seence then Nanette, she calm down some. But me, I theenk she steel love heem in spite all he do an' say. Nanette, she's queer girl; nobody understan' her."

During the next half hour's travel, Wayne, deep in thought, traveled some distance behind Rouge Dubois. Now he heard the habitant utter a shout and looked up to find him kneeling beside a dark shadow in the snow. Wayne hurried ahead, his mind

filled with a dozen wild conjectures and hopes. Was it Cecile, was it Nanette, or was it Black?

A moment later he saw that it was no one of the three. It was their komatic on which Black had dashed ahead, and, still harnessed to it, were the dogs, curled up in hollows in the snow for greater warmth, their hides raw in places from recent use of the whip. Rouge Dubois was staring at them in puzzled amazement.

"By damn, m'sieu, I don' see through this at all," he stammered. "Theese dog, she been here all night. You see, she make nes' in snow for keep warm; dog she always do that. But where's Nanette Dubois and Beel Black, eh, what, m'sieu?"

Wayne felt suddenly confused, as if he had entered a wholly blind trail. The thing was mysterious; there were no tracks visible leading anywhere. Presumably, the sledge had come over the same trail as themselves, yet where had Bill Black and Nanette left it? Were they somewhere at the rear and had Wayne and Rouge Dubois passed them during the storm, or were they traveling on ahead? It seemed improbable that Black could be in any condition to proceed on foot, improbable that Nanette would go off and desert a sledge and dogs, even when the animals had been as badly abused as had these. Huskies are amazingly hardy animals; they may appear about

to drop with fatigue, yet a night's rest and food soon renews their strength.

Ought they to back track and try to find Black and Nanette, or keep on toward Fort Carillon, still more than a day's journey away? To these questions there was no answer, to follow either course might be wrong, for Nanette and Black might have gone off on some other trail. Of only one thing was Wayne sure; wherever Black was going, there was Cecile Dennison, for the one thing on which Black's mind was firmly set was to overtake Cecile before his option to the Chovard tract expired.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE THOUSANDTH CHANCE

WAYNE shook his head doubtfully as he gazed over the bleak expanse of white.

"It's a toss up whether we look for them on the back trail or keep on to the fort," he said.

Rouge Dubois, who had been carefully examining the snow all about the dogs and the komatic, digging little pits here and there with his mitten, looked up and spoke.

"M'sieu, theese dog she don' come here over Little Babo' trail at all. She come from West."

"If that is true, we're worse off than before," answered Wayne. "Before we had two possible directions in which to search; now we've got three."

"*Non, non,* m'sieu," denied Rouge. "To the west ees ole lady Marquette; she ees still open, or mabbe leetle ice. Me, I theenk Beel Black, he fin' dogs so tired he drive toward river, mabbe to wait for canoe there, or raf'. When he get there, he let theese dogs loose and she come back here."

"But Etienne Paravent said it was almost im-

possible to pole a raft or a canoe through the rapids against the current at this season of the year. Black couldn't be fool enough in his weakened condition to attempt going to Fort Carillon in that way."

Rouge Dubois smiled. "That right; Beel Black, hees damn rascal, but not damn fool. I theenk he plan for go *down* stream, not up."

Wayne's eyes lifted quickly. "Back to the lake!" he snapped. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Me, I don' theenk of her either," answered Dubois, "until I fin' track underneath snow that say theese dog she come from direction of Marquette, an' she been drive veree hard. I tell you what, m'sieu, Beel Black, hees go there to take firs' canoe or raf' what come along and ride back to lake."

"Wait a minute," said Wayne. "Here's something we didn't think of. Black may have caught up with Nanette's fresh dog team carrying Miss Dennison and shifted to that sledge. That may have been his reason for deserting this worn-out team."

Rouge Dubois nodded. "Mabbe so, m'sieu. Anyway, I theenk we bes' go toward Marquette. Beel Black, he likely haf wait two-t'ree-four day before canoe or raf', she come along." The eyes of Rouge Dubois glittered as he added: "An' me, I wan' leetle talk weeth that Beel Black myself."

"All right," said Wayne. "You know this country

a hundred times better than I do and I'm going to follow your hunch. Let's mush on with these dogs and lose no time."

Wayne's experience with Dubois had bred in him a daily increasing confidence in the habitant's judgment and almost uncanny knowledge of the trail. Rouge was not a man who never made mistakes, but he was right often enough for Wayne to feel sure that following him was a wise policy.

The great-hearted Dubois, on his part, had grown to love Wayne like a brother. He had realized from their first meeting that Yeatman was a strong man who was dead square, even when to continue on that course went against himself, and nothing could appeal more to the French-Canadian than that.

They had been traveling three hours when Rouge, halting to prospect for sledge and dog signs beneath the snow, paused and gave an exultant shout.

"By damn! You dope her right, m'sieu," he said. "Beel Black, he fin' Nanette's komatic weeth fresh dog here. He change to her and let our team go loose. Then he mush north, north, m'sieu! But he go slow because he got heavy load for them dog."

For a moment Wayne's hope of telling Cecile Dennison about his gold strike on the Chovard tract seemed gone. If Black had caught up with Nan-

ette's komatic, surely Cecile must have been on it. And yet——

"By the eternal, I'll not give up," he thought. "I went out for that thousandth chance; I believe I've still got it."

Another hour of travel and Dubois again halted and began to examine the snow carefully. Finally he straightened up, his face grim.

"M'sieu, we got heem," he said quietly. "Beel Black, he make camp here for res'; mabbe he seek, mabbe Nanette—or ma'amselle. They quit theese camp only short tam ago, mush north."

Wayne's face was as grim and hard as that of Dubois now.

"Crowd those dogs," he urged. "Don't lose a second."

The whip of Rouge Dubois cracked viciously over the backs of the huskies. The sledge had shot ahead but a few hundred yards when they saw a dark huddled heap directly in their path. At first Wayne thought it was Cecile and a tremendous rage filled the heart of him. If it were Cecile abandoned there by Black, he knew what it must mean.

It was not Cecile; it was Nanette Dubois. She heard them coming, lifted drawn white features and a queer look overspread her face as she pointed west and cried:

"Don't stop for me. Bill threw me off to lighten his load. He's mushing toward the river now. Hurry and you're sure to catch him."

Wayne's heart gave a leap of exultation only to sink again as he saw that Rouge Dubois, instead of turning west, was still driving his team north. Was the man crazy? As they passed Nanette, she tried, ineffectively, to catch at the sledge, a sudden born rage convulsing her features.

"Where the devil are you going?" screamed Wayne to Dubois. "Nanette said west."

Rouge Dubois turned and winked. "Sure, sure, m'sieu; but she don' fool me none. I see devil look in her eye when she say west, and know she mean north. Me, I know that Nanette. Eef Beel Black he keel her, I theenk Nanette she kees heem when he do eet. I follow trail, not Nanette."

Wayne understood. Heavens, what a woman, he thought! The man she loved fleeing into the north with another after throwing her from the sledge, and she still willing to lead his followers astray.

No need to urge on Rouge Dubois now; he had too many scores of his own to settle with Bill Black.

For a mile they raced madly on through the storm. Finally, blown down the wind, they caught the yelps of another dog team somewhere ahead. Their own team set up answering calls; Wayne cursed them

deeply as he listened, realizing that the sound would warn those ahead and spur them to redoubled effort. Was it Black, he wondered, aware of the chance that it might be some other trail musher going north?

A second later Rouge Dubois turned back toward Wayne with puzzled face as he shouted:

"M'sieu, I don' hear them dog any longer. Mabbe they stop. I theenk we bes' go careful. Mabbe Beel Black, hees gone do like Nanette, hol' us up from some shelter beside trail."

"Mush on," shouted Wayne in answer. "We've got to take the chance."

Dubois shrugged indifferent shoulders and whipped up the dogs. Then, abruptly, from out of the dense snow curtain ahead, there came the report of a rifle. Wayne caught the snarling whine of the bullet as it passed him and then looked at Rouge Dubois in consternation as he saw him switch the dog team abruptly off to the right.

"The damn quitter," he thought, and had half risen on the sledge with the idea of taking control of the animals himself when he saw Rouge turn the dogs again, this time to the left and dash them frantically on at increased speed. The wily veteran of the trail was zigzagging to avoid the shots that were coming more rapidly now, evidently from a pump gun.

Then, suddenly, from the wrack of the storm, they

were able to pick out the shadowed mass of the dog team ahead. Small use to zigzag now, for Black had also seen them and whipped up his team.

One hand clutching the gee-pole, Rouge Dubois hung out over the dogs, urging them on with frantic cries and vicious cuts of the whip. Wayne hugged the sledge, indifferent to the bullets that whined about him. He had caught sight of Cecile Dennison's face looking back with wildly appealing eyes.

She was lashed to the komatic; above her crouched Bill Black, at one moment forcing on his huskies, the next turning to discharge his rifle toward the following team. His sledge rocked violently and, so far, his every shot had gone wild.

Suddenly, as Wayne strained his eyes ahead that he might lose no move of Black's, he saw the man cast the rifle violently aside with a gesture of disgust. Evidently the weapon had been Nanette's and Black had exhausted all the available ammunition.

Rouge Dubois had also seen. His mouth broke into a grim smile. He glanced back exultantly toward Wayne and then lashed his team ahead at redoubled speed. The habitant already imagined his hands clutching at Black's throat.

But Black still had a card left. As he saw the sledge of Rouge Dubois slowly but surely drawing closer, he watched with glittering eyes, one hand in-

side his parka, the other clutching at the sledge. Wayne had scarcely time to shout a frantic warning to Rouge: "Watch out! I think he's holding back an automatic until we get closer!" when Black drew the weapon and fired.

A nauseating darkness was closing in all about him as Wayne tumbled headlong from the sledge into the snow, his last thought:

"Black wins, but nobody can say I haven't played the game square to the end for the kid; I'm sorry for her."

CHAPTER XXV

NEMESIS

Rouge Dubois saw Wayne fall and knew he had been seriously injured, but he did not halt the dogs; the rage crowded mind of him was dominated by a single desire, to overtake that team ahead that he might fasten his ten fingers around the throat of the man who drove it and who had just shot his friend.

But one cartridge had been left in Black's automatic; now he was giving all his attention to urging on the dogs, taking the single chance left to him, for he had read aright the fate filled message in the eyes of Rouge Dubois and he knew that death and the habitant rode together. In his own crippled condition, he would stand scarce half a chance against the powerful hands and arms of Rouge Dubois. Better, he thought now, had he aimed his last shot at Dubois.

Dubois' sledge was drawing in closer, Rouge standing with bent knees ready to leap, his face convulsed with anger. Another moment and the two dog teams, one sledge overturned, raced on side by

side, leaving behind two men, battling madly in a white cloud of snow, Black fighting grimly with feet, hands and teeth to loosen the death grip of Rouge Dubois on his throat.

Useless effort: he might as well have struggled against the relentlessly tightening jaws of a gigantic steel vice. His face purple, Black's muscles finally began to relax as the strength left him. Dubois shook him twice with bare teeth, like an infuriated animal that has at last found its quarry. Then he loosed his hold; Black did not stir.

Dubois arose and peered ahead to where the dog teams, both now minus a guiding hand, had come to a clash in the snow and were a tangled heap of snarling, biting bone and muscle, every animal against the other. Hurrying toward them, he began plying the whip and striking out right and left with his feet until the dogs were finally separated and something of order restored. Then he released Cecile Dennison from the cramped position in which she had been roped to the komatic.

"Ma'amselle, are you hurt?" he asked solicitously as he saw her try to struggle to her feet and then fall back with white features.

"Never mind me," she cried. "It is because I have not eaten for a long time and am weak. Hurry

back and see how badly Mr. Yeatman has been injured."

Rouge Dubois ran to where Wayne lay face downward in the snow, and turned him over. He was breathing, but the front of his mackinaw and the snow beneath him was colored with blood. Dubois lifted him in his arms and carried him back to where the sledge teams waited.

"Ma'amselle, I theenk m'sieu he got hees good-by theese tam," he said sadly. "He's breathe—leetle; but he lose pretty much blood back there. He's got bad shot in breast."

"Lay him here beside me, and I'll see," said Cecile. "I wish I had some stimulant."

Tenderly she unfastened Wayne's mackinaw, then his woolen shirt and turned them back to disclose an ugly wound in his side, just below the left arm pit.

At first the sight of so much blood almost made her swoon, but she clenched her teeth and fought the faintness off. Reaching one hand beneath him and inside his shirt, she tried to discover whether the bullet had lodged in the muscles at the back or passed out.

There was a tiny opening in the flesh below the shoulder blade. Her anxiously beating heart slowed down. If the lung was not penetrated, a fact that

seemed reasonably certain, since no blood had come from his mouth, she knew now that Wayne had a fighting chance for life.

She withdrew her blood-smeared hand and glanced up to find Rouge Dubois looking down on her as he held forward a bottle filled with a pale amber liquid.

"Mabbe, ma'amselle, you theenk leetle squirrel whiskey some stimulant? She sure got beeg kick in her, eef that do any good. I fin' her on our komatic what Beel Black steal; me, I always carry leetle hooch wherever I go."

Cecile's glance brightened and she took the bottle from Dubois' hand.

"That's fine," she said in a voice of encouragement and then, to the infinite disgust of Rouge Dubois, instead of making Wayne drink of the fiery liquid, she began to pour it over his wound.

"By damn, ma'amselle, you gone crazee?" he exclaimed in astonishment. "She's not water, I tell you; she's squirrel whiskey. For drink, not wash; make drunk—eef you so lucky you get enough of her."

"I understand," she answered. "But, in this case, it happens to be more useful as an antiseptic than as a drink, though I shall give him a little after I've finished dressing the wound."

Beneath her gentle and skillful ministrations

Wayne began to revive. A moment and he had opened his eyes. She did not know it until she felt his hand touch hers softly and heard him say:

"You're real, aren't you? I thought you were a dream."

"You'll have to keep quiet if you wish me to attend to your wound," she answered without meeting his eyes. Her voice was businesslike and austere.

"All right, kid, I'll behave. But, if it's not too much trouble, I wish you'd tell me what happened."

"You were shot by Bill Black," she answered curtly without slowing up any in the process of dressing his wound. "I don't think it will do you any good to talk; you'd better keep as quiet as possible. I'm not exactly positive about that lung of yours, whether it was penetrated or how close the shot came."

"But what's become of Black?" he insisted.

"I think your guide killed him," she answered. "But I'm not sure. He lays back there in the snow. I'm going to have him brought here as soon as I finish with you. That's all your questions I intend to answer, so you may as well keep to yourself any more you have in mind to ask."

He gripped her wrist, gripped it with more strength than she had any idea was left in him.

"No, by God, you're not going to stop with that,"

he snapped in his old manner. "I've one more question you've got to answer or—well, I don't know just what I'll do, but it won't be pleasant, I know that. Will you answer it?"

At last she met his glowing eyes; but there was only a look of scorn in hers.

"You haven't got your whip with you; but I *may* consent to answer your question—if I consider it of sufficient importance."

He winced as quickly beneath her taunt as if she had herself struck him with a whip. She saw and her eyes softened a little, but only a little—and he did not see.

"Have you sold out to Bill Black; that's what I want to know?" he asked, as he felt his strength ebbing.

She looked at him a moment, her eyes narrowed. To him it seemed hours before he heard her voice answering as from a great distance with something of sorrow and contrition in it.

"He caught up with me before his option expired, and he had the money with him, a certified check. There was no alternative; I had to keep my bargain."

Wayne arose on one elbow, raging mad, his eyes blazing. "Oh, you—you stupid fool," he stammered. "That land is worth hundreds of millions,

perhaps billions. Billions, do you hear? It's fairly peppered with nuggets of free gold, and your claim was the only one that held; mine was worthless. Now you've sold out for a pittance. For God's sake, why do you suppose I was racing after you at the risk of my life? You cussed little simpleton, couldn't you have held Black off? You're just like every woman, got to go ahead in your own way if it kills you. I'm——"

He could say no more; her reproachful, tear-filled eyes, all he could see of her face, seemed to recede farther and farther from him with every word he uttered until he could no longer see them at all. And then he tried to apologize, to frame words that would tell her how sorry he was that he had permitted ungoverned anger to get the best of him, to again make him play the brute. But it was too late; the darkness had come again, to stay with him, except for fitful moments that were half delirium, for many hours.

"Well, at least he'll keep quiet for a while now," she said, pillowed his head on one of the duffle bags, turned to Dubois and added:

"Please bring me Bill Black; I'll see what I can do for him."

The eyes of Rouge Dubois that had been watching

Wayne Yeatman anxiously and tenderly, grew suddenly hard.

"By damn, ma'amselle, I won' do her!" he cried. "That damn—well, ma'amselle, you know what he ees, eef I don' say her. Hees mos' dead, perhaps all dead, anyway; an' me, I wouldn't geeve heem drop of water eef one drop she breeng heem back from hell; he's not worth half eet."

Cecile's shoulders straightened; her voice became calm and icy.

"You can bring Black up here or I'll drag myself down there and attend to him. He's done as much against me as he has against you, perhaps more, but I wouldn't permit the worst criminal alive to die like that, no matter what he had done to me. I'd be as bad as he if I did. I thought you were a man before, Rouge Dubois; now I'm beginning to have doubts."

The moment Rouge Dubois faced that steel gray stare he knew he was going to do precisely as she ordered, but for the life of him, he couldn't understand why.

"Wall, I do her," he said finally, like a bashful schoolboy that had just been threatened with a whipping. "But, by damn, she for you, ma'amselle, not for that——"

Cecile did not catch all of the heart-felt cursing

Rouge Dubois gave Bill Black, but she caught enough to know that it was volcanic. A wan smile filled her eyes as she threw after him:

"Thank you for that precise description of a rascal, Rouge Dubois; it's just the way I'd liked to have put it myself if I were not a woman."

Dubois looked back with a grin: "Ma'amselle! Me, I theenk you the real goods. When you get theese two men feex up, I like for shake your han'!"

CHAPTER XXVI

FOREVER AFTER

WHEN Wayne Yeatman again awoke to real sensibility, it was to find himself back in the same bed at Frosty Blink's where he had been so ill before, and about him solicitously hovered the huge form of Rosalie Dubois.

At first he thought that the whole string of his adventures in going to and returning from Big Loon Lake must have been only a dream and tried to ask Rosalie about it: but she laid gentle fingers on his lips and forbade his speaking.

"M'sieu," she whispered, "the doctor say you mus' not talk. That shot from Beel Black's automatic, she come very close to the lung, and eef you talk, mabbe she break through. Then, m'sieu, I theenk she goodnight."

There were a hundred questions Wayne wanted to ask, but he realized that Rosalie's order must be obeyed.

Finally came a day when he could sit up in bed and Rosalie told him he might receive one visitor

for ten minutes; not the fraction of a second longer, she insisted. The person he most wanted to see was Cecile Dennison, but his courage was not yet equal to facing her, so he asked Rosalie to find Tom Porteous.

It was a much changed Porteous who finally entered the room. Gone was his breezy effervescent manner and the joyous sparkle in his eyes. He looked as if he had just quitted the death bed of his best friend.

"Great hokum! What ails you?" exclaimed Wayne. "Why this settled melancholy?"

Porteous slumped into a chair. "Yeatman, I'm sorry," he said. "Rosalie said you wanted to see me, but I ought to have framed an excuse and kept away. I've got nothing but bad news."

"Well, spill it," said Wayne. "It'll be none the better for holding back; what is it?"

"Hampex, that's all," answered Porteous lugubriously.

Wayne stared at him with puzzled eyes. For an instant he could not understand. Then:

"Hampex!" he exclaimed. "What the——"

"I should think it was what the," said Porteous. "Yeatman, I've been a double riveted damn fool. Hampex blew the lid off the Curb market more than two weeks ago; to be exact, the day after I got

your news of that gold strike. You didn't say, and I supposed it was on the Black-Downey property, wirelessed New York to that effect. Hampex shot to forty-eight; dollars, not cents."

Wayne had been doing some rapid fire mental figuring.

"Great hokum! That means a tremendous profit over the price you paid!" he exclaimed.

"Meant, not means," corrected Porteous.

"My brokers fairly begged me to sell. Like a triple plated dumb-bell, I wanted the earth. I held out for fifty; the Black-Downey brokers jumped into the breach, sold bushels of stock right and left and Hampex promptly skidded back to where it started from—and that's where you and I are, Yeatman, a couple of poor gwifs who ought to know better than try to buck the Black-Downey interests."

"They must have cleaned up millions," said Wayne.

"Sweet cement! I should think so," answered Porteous. "And I was the slack-witted straw man who made their market for them."

Wayne dropped back on his pillow, feeling tremendously depressed. He had lost out with Black, he had lost out with Cecile Dennison; and now his hope of making something on his Hampex stock was

gone. Everything he touched seemed to turn to dead-sea fruit.

"What's become of Black?" he asked. "Did he recover from that fight with Rouge Dubois?"

"Recover!" exclaimed Porteous. "You can't kill one of his breed. They've just passed a final decision against him in the Canadian courts on that squatter's claim to his Big Loon Lake land, and he and his Italians will have to get out; but he doesn't appear to be worried any over that. He left for Quebec this morning, grinning like a cat that had just swallowed a canary. Got some new scheme up his sleeve, I suppose."

Wayne had a sudden recurring memory.

"Great hokum, I forgot to tell you!" he exclaimed, and, in a few blurting sentences he explained about Black's purchase of the Chovard tract from Cecile Dennison.

"That's the scheme Black has up his sleeve now," said Wayne. "He knew all the time there was some gold on the Chovard tract; he found it and shifted the boundary markers to make it appear that it was on his own; but he doesn't know about my big strike of the mother lode. His strike wasn't anything astonishing, but it is enough to warrant his buying back Hampex at the bottom and using a fresh gold report to skyrocket the price for another big clean-

up. All we need do now is hold on to our Hampex, wait for the rise and cash in ourselves. Before we made Black's market; this time he'll make ours."

Wayne was becoming all enthusiasm; but there was no reflection of this in the face of Tom Porteous.

"Sorry, Yeatman," he said. "But we haven't any Hampex to hold on to. Don't you understand; we've been sold out, both of us. I couldn't put up any more margin when the price dropped and the brokers had to sell all our stock to protect themselves."

Porteous had just time to conclude his dejected explanation when Rosalie entered.

"M'sieu," she said, "you been here fifteen minutes; you haf go now."

"It's too blamed bad," thought Wayne after Porteous' departure. "That rascal Black will make another fortune out of the kid's land that he got for a mere song. I'm beginning to suspect that it doesn't pay to be honest."

With that thought Wayne dropped off and slumbered for two hours. When he awoke it was evening, there was no light in the room and he had a strange feeling that some one was standing beside his bed. He spoke.

"Who is it? Is anybody there?"

"I golly, boy, you're awake at last, are you? I

bin' waitin' here most half an hour. Rosalie told me I could come in, but I mustn't speak until you woke up. Boy, I got some news for you."

Though he could not see him, Wayne recognized the squeaky voice of Frosty Blink.

"What is it?" he asked.

"You remember that business of your claim to the Chovard tract?" inquired Frosty.

"Yes, what about it?"

"I just got back from Quebec today," replied Frosty. "I bin' lookin' it up; found out who the men were who sat in with Square-deal Jack Merode and your grandaddy in that second big all-night poker game."

"The second game," repeated Wayne. "I'd forgotten there was a second game."

"I told you about it," squeaked Frosty. "The first game was between Jack Merode, your grandaddy, Rouge Dubois, and a man named Waters; —Bill Black warn't in it. Your grandad lost everything he had to Jack Merode that night, includin' his claim to the Chovard tract and even the coat on his back."

"Yes, I know that," said Wayne. "Rouge Dubois told me."

"The second game, several months later, was at Quebec. Your grandad, Jack Merode, a man named

Tom Vance—he's dead now—and another man, a lawyer named Bob Wheeler, sat at the table. Wheeler lives in Quebec. I saw him. He said that in the second game your grandad evened up that cleanin' Jack Merode guv him in the first game, and pulled down eight thousand dollars of Jack Merode's money beside."

Wayne gasped; he was just beginning to see the tremendous possibilities in Frosty Blink's news, if——

"But did Grandfather Yeatman win back his claim to the Chovard tract in that second game?" he whipped out.

"I golly, he sure did," answered Frosty. "Wheeler drew up the new deed and handed it to your grandaddy himself."

"But how did it come that Jack Merode also had a deed?"

"Wheeler told me he guv the old deed back to Merode after he'd made out the new one for your grandad—Jack said he wanted the old one to frame as a souvenir. It was probably found among his effects and the widder, not knowin' about the later deed, thought hers was good."

Wayne was thunderstruck; it was he, Wayne Yeatman, not Bill Black, who owned the enormously

rich Chovard tract. Black's claim, that he had bought from Cecile Dennison, was valueless.

He canvassed the situation rapidly. Then:

"Frosty, you find Tom Porteous as quickly as God and your legs will let you and tell him all you've told me, also tell him that he and Rouge Dubois are in on this with me. He'll know what to do."

He waited a moment before adding: "Is Miss Dennison still at the fort?"

"Was when I came in here," squeaked Frosty. "Sittin' downstairs in my parlor readin' one of them consarned phisicology books of hern—I peeked in one of 'em one day; darndest nonsense!"

"On your way out," said Wayne, "please ask Miss Dennison to step in here a moment if she will. I've got to tell her about this deed business and find out when hers is dated. I know the date on mine."

For many moments Wayne lay in the dark and quiet room, waiting. Finally the door opened gently, some one entered, went to the table and struck a match. As the lamp wick flared up, lighting her features with a softly warm glow, he saw that it was Cecile Dennison. The sight of her thrilled him to his outermost nerve end, but he fought to keep calm, sure that she was not for him, to stifle the tremendous longing in his heart.

Finally she turned and faced him, leaning with her clasped hands behind her against the table.

"What did you wish?"

Her voice was calm and even. He could not see her eyes, only her form and her brilliant flame-of-gold hair silhouetted against the light from the lamp.

"Do you mind listening to me a moment?" he asked.

"If you think you can talk without losing your temper, I may not mind," she answered, the merest hint of sarcasm in her voice.

"First, I want to apologize for losing it the last time we talked," he said. "I was so vexed at the moment that I spoke wholly without reason or thought. And I——"

"That's all right," she interrupted, coming closer, standing beside his pillow. "I understand a great many things now that I did not then. I had no possible idea at the time why you were following us, and thought it might be because you had business with Bill Black."

"No," he said gravely, "my business was entirely with you. I thought then that you owned the Chovard tract and I wanted to tell you about the gold strike there before Black had the chance to take up his option."

There came a puzzled look in her eyes. "You

thought then that I owned the Chovard tract?" she repeated. "Don't you still think so?"

He gave her Frosty Blink's version of the two card games, adding in conclusion: "My deed is dated Quebec, September 12, 1897; do you recall the date on yours?"

She dropped into a chair beside the bed, her face gone suddenly white as she gasped: "Of course I remember; it's dated at Fort Carillon, December 4, 1896. Why! why! I never owned the Chovard tract at all; that deed wasn't worth the paper it was written on."

"Sure wasn't," he said.

She arose. "I must go now," she said. "I must not remain here another moment."

"Why not?" he asked a little wistfully. Though she was not for him, he could never tire of looking at her.

"Because—don't you understand? I can't keep Bill Black's money now. I must stop collection on that check; or, if it has been paid, make a refund. I never owned the Chovard tract, so how could I sell it?"

"You had a claim, even if it wasn't a good one," insisted Wayne. "And nobody knew better than Black that that was all you did have, for he tried to buy from me before he tried to buy from you. You

played a blamed sight fairer with him than he did with you."

"Yes, it might be fair with him," she answered. "But would it be fair with myself to take his money, even if I needed it, which I don't? It isn't what you'd do, is it?"

"Well, no," he acknowledged grudgingly. "I don't suppose it is."

"Then that's guide enough for me," she answered. "I haven't always played the game straight in the past; I was taught that a woman, because she was a woman, would be permitted to cheat a little; that she had to cheat a little in order to hold her own against her natural antagonist, man. I know better now, know there are few finer joys in life than can be found in the personal satisfaction of having played absolutely square, even though you have lost by doing so. You promised when we started out, to show me how to live up here: I have learned that your way is also how to live anywhere."

"All right, Miss Dennison, I guess you're got the proper slant; but you're giving me entirely too much——"

She interrupted quickly, her eyes suddenly become soft and tender:

"Please don't call me Miss Dennison; call me kid,

as you always have. You don't know how I have grown to—to like it."

He drew a sudden gasping breath. It seemed, for a second, as if he had been tossed unexpectedly into a topsy-turvy world where nothing was as he had supposed it to be. He searched her face, the pent-up emotion of months in his hunger filled eyes. She did not avoid his gaze, and in the beryl-gray depths of her own the warmth and tenderness still abode.

Impulsively, he had taken both her hands and started to draw her toward him when he released them quickly.

"No, kid, I'll not be a fool again," he said. "I'm sure now that I love you far too much to take any chance of making you unhappy."

She watched him a moment thoughtfully. Then, in a voice that was little more than a whisper:

"What do you mean; is it money?"

"Money!" he exclaimed. "If what Frosty Blink has told me is true, and it looks like it is, I'll dig money enough from the Chovard tract to buy you Paris and tie a pink satin ribbon around it."

He waited a moment before going on, arranging his thoughts in order.

"But there's something else I haven't got—in fact, there are several somethings. Education is one of them. Listen, kid: how would I stack up beside

such hand cultivated chaps as Tom Hallerton and the hundred other society bugs you probably know? Why, in a room full of that sort of folks, I'd appear like something the cat had brought in by mistake. I've got no manners, and I've never associated with people who had any to speak of, until I met you."

"You've got something a thousand times better," she asserted with a firm mouth. "Whole hearted manliness and a soul and body that is clean and pure. Your manners may not have been sand papered yet, you may not know now what fork to use with your fish at dinner; but all that can be quickly acquired. Your language is crude, but that also will wear off with the other crudities—in fact, a big lot of them have worn off since I first met you—though, under stress of strong emotion they may all come back for a moment—as on the day you were shot by Bill Black."

Her lips hung over his, but they did not meet. A vast wonder was in his eyes.

"But I'm afraid I've treated you pretty rough in the past; it will be hard, forgetting that."

"I should have hated you if you had babied me," she said quickly. "I'd much rather you beat me than that—and I think there have been times when I deserved to be beaten. Your treatment was pre-

cisely what I needed; to be brutally frank and vulgar, it put guts into me."

"Then you really think I might possibly—well, get by?" he stammered boyishly.

"If you don't, it will be my fault," she answered a little proudly. "You're going to be made over to my order, and I'll be responsible for the product."

"Don't you think it's rather a large order you're taking?" he asked, the ghost of a twinkle in his eyes.

"I'm glad to take it," she answered, "though I don't think it's going to be at all a large order. Since I came up here I've learned to despise many small and petty things I thought were fine before—to love the real, the big two-fisted undertakings, and to really live. I've sensed the joy there is in carrying through against obstacles. I don't think there is much of anything in life could daunt me now: surely not this, when I place it against my great love—and I do love you, Wayne."

"All right, kid, we'll see," he said, and drew her face down to his.

Then, after a moment: "But we may scrap."

"Of course we will," she answered quickly. "But what of that? So long as it's an honest give and take, I'm not afraid, and, with us, it shall always be that.

"I'm no longer a spoiled baby. I've learned to stand the whip, as you once called it. The good Lord deliver me forever after from a life that has been made perpetually smooth and easy to my going by somebody else. I want the chance to do some of the smoothing myself, and I want the doing to be hard work, so that it may be sweet when it is done, and may have brought out the best that is in me."

He chuckled happily. "If you stack up with me, kid, you'll get that."

THE END

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